Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Condition-of-England Novel

Lisa Bilella

Submitted in accordance with the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of English

February 2022

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Acknowledgements

It takes a village, as they say. There have been many people who, over the course of several years, have helped to shape this thesis into what it is today. Even those who don't necessarily know it, have provided tremendous help in helping me to order my thoughts, and explain in real words what, and who my work is about. So, I want to start off by thanking everyone that's innocently asked, 'what is your thesis about?', got more than they bargained for by way of answer, and politely listened anyhow. Especially Susannah, who probably heard much more than she ever bargained for. I want to thank Amy and Granville, whose expertise and support during my days at Saint John's encouraged me to pursue this research. I also want to thank my supervisor, Richard, who has been very understanding during a very difficult period, and still expressed confidence in me and my ideas when I began to lose it.

Above all, I want to thank my parents, Michael and Lynda, and my partner Christian. To my parents, who nurtured my love of literature from a young age and who's hard work made it possible for me to study at the highest level, I can never thank you enough. And to Christian, who gave me a safe place to land during one of the most challenging periods of my life, and always endeavoured to understand me. I could not have made it this far without the three of you. Your tireless support, freely given since day one, open ears, and kind words have made this all possible.

Abstract

This study considers the ways in which the novels of the Condition-of-England period manifested Victorian conceptions about the tangible effects of sympathising with and through works of fiction by tracking just one of many sympathetic traditions available at the time, that of the Scottish Enlightenment. There have been two broad schools of thought regarding this group of novels—which, for my study, will include includes Disraeli's *Sybil* (1844), Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1867), and, an atypical selection, Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* (1839). One approach, largely dismissive of the Victorian social-problem novel's politics as ineffectual, regards their emphasis on sympathy with suffering as a substitute for more concrete forms of action. Some critics of the industrial novel argue that the novel's investment in sympathy is a strategic method of assuaging the guilty feelings that illustrations of poverty give rise to, and ultimately reifies the structural inequalities that makes such degradation possible. Others, in viewing the political aims of these novels more sympathetically, have likewise approached the topic of sympathy and feeling with less suspicion, showing how the language of sympathy offered a mode of social organization alternative to Carlyle's reviled 'cash-nexus'. Building off a current trend in affect studies that has foregrounded the work of Adam Smith on sympathy in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), I aim to demonstrate how sympathy became entangled in the competing language structure of both radical social change and civil conservation. In so doing, I will argue that the Condition-of-England novels and responses to them could shed light on the sympathetic aims of the Victorian novel, and how the subversive possibilities of communal feelings were systematically converted into the critical distance and detachment of pity.

Table of Contents:

List of Tables:

Novel Sympathy and the Condition-of-England; Setting the Terms

The habitual novel-reader indulges in fictious feelings so much, that there is great risk of sound and healthy feeling becoming perverted, or, benumbed [...] The literary pity evoked by fiction leads to no corresponding action; the susceptibilities which it excites involve neither inconvenience, nor self-sacrifice; so that the heart that is touched too often by the fiction may, at length, become insensible to the reality.

—Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*[1]

When, in 1859, Samuel Smiles wrote about the dangers of 'fictitious feelings' and 'literary pity',

he was warning against the 'prostitut[ion]' of education employed 'as a mere means of intellectual

dissipation and amusement'.[2] He argued that 'popular literature' was in the grips of a 'mania for

frivolity and amusement' and therefore a 'pernicious' influence on the young.[3] And Smiles was

far from alone in this assessment of the novel's literary value; prominent Victorian 'social critics'

Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold and William Morris all expressed, at one time or

another, disdain for novels and those who read them.[4] This scepticism was expressed throughout

the century even though, as Patrick Brantlinger and William B Thesing point out, by the 1840s

'anti-novel attitudes' were already beginning to wane as novel-reading became more socially

acceptable.[5] Still, as the nineteenth century wore on and the Victorian novel reached its artistic

and intellectual zenith, the notion that novel-reading could pervert the vulnerable, inflame the

radical and provoke the criminal was a continual objection of conservative critics.[6]

What is most curious about these objections, like Smiles' above, is the implication that

popular novels marry trivial entertainment with the insidious, even while inadvertent, corrosion

of 'sound and healthy feeling'. This anxiety stemmed from the understanding that novels

transmitted more than just ideas from the pen of the author to the mind of the reader; they

introduced new feelings, too. These alien emotions—generated in the reader not through lived

---

[1] Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character, Conduct and Perseverance,* (New York: Harper and Brothers Company, 1878), p. 366.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 365.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 365-66.
[4] Patrick Brantlinger and William B Thesing, 'Introduction', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 3.
[5] *Ibid.* p. 3.
[6] Jonathan Rose, 'Education, Literacy and the Victorian Reader', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, p. 35.

experience but cultivated by design—became the nucleus of anti-novel sentiment for a few reasons. For one thing, 'fictitious feelings' were, at times, considered just that: feelings that were not real or were frivolous indulgences, because they were prompted by that which itself was not real. For another, the idea that inexperienced readers might act on the feelings produced by fiction was a cause of genuine, and often sexist, concern—at least for the writers of conduct books and reading manuals.[7] And finally, in a peculiar rhetorical twist which allowed them to have their cake and eat it too, anti-novel sceptics also argued that literary emotions could be harmful to readers because they got in the way of 'real' feelings, and discouraged the conversion of emotion into action.

Indeed, Smiles' condemnation of 'popular literature' in *Self-Help* fuses these concerns. He argues 'fictitious feelings' ought to be 'indulge[d]' in only sparingly, for a 'highly spiced […] literary diet' was liable to make one 'insensible' to less piquant, but real 'pictures of human life'.[8] In this view, the feelings given rise to by fiction have a potency which real feelings cannot match, because fictions are specially crafted by the author to meet and exceed current literary 'taste'.[9] The persistence of the gastronomic metaphor in this judgement is telling for its structuring of taste against appetite, or that which is socially decorous against the coarseness of bodily desire. In his recent work on food and the marriage plot, Michael Parrish Lee has argued that Malthus's *Essay on the Principles of Population* (1798) made explicit connections between food production and sexuality, so that, for the Victorians, the desire for food was often symbolic of other kinds of desiring bodies.[10] For Smiles then, in delivering 'old-fashioned, but wholesome lessons' for the young, that novel-reading should become so conflated with culinary excess indicates a like anxiety about its prurient effects.[11] This argument crucially binds up literary emotion in the

---

[7] *Ibid.* p. 41.
[8] Smiles, p. 365-366.
[9] *Ibid.* p. 365.
[10] Michael Parrish Lee, 'Gaskell's Food Plots and the Biopolitics of the Industrial Novel', in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 47. 3, (2019), 511- 539, p. 513.
[11] Smiles, p. viii.

competing languages of the body and of propriety, so to experience feelings occasioned by fiction is not only an act of sensuous consumption, but also unseemly performance; it is not *reading* that is the 'indulgence' but the wilful embodiment of imaginary passions that is.

Furthermore, while Smiles' argument casts novel-reading as a spur to immorality, it also paradoxically suggests that fictious feelings interrupt necessary social activity. Underlying this anxiety is Smiles' refrain that all readers have some amount of social responsibility and that imaginary feelings significantly disrupt the execution of that responsibility. This seems an ironic assertion given the title of Smiles' instructional work, but in the preface to the second edition, Smiles himself clarified the import of 'self-help':

Although its chief object unquestionably is to stimulate youths to apply themselves diligently to right pursuits—sparing neither labour, pains, nor self-denial […] it will also be found, from the examples given […] that the duty of helping one's self in the highest sense involves the helping of one's neighbours.[12]

Thus, the warning that the 'heart touched too often by fiction' becomes 'insensible to the reality' is founded on two assumptions: the first, that emotional capacity is finite, and the second, that literary passions displace the 'real' passions they are fundamentally distinct from. Smiles is committed to the notion that fictious feelings could use up, or wear down the emotional range of readers, and to the opinion that literary emotions have no bearing on the real. In catering to contemporary tastes, novels have little nutritional value, and neutralise, rather than energise the reader. Because the intensity of literary emotion is necessarily greater than that of 'sound and healthy' feeling, the reader is in danger of dulling their own sensibilities to their neighbours' needs. On another note, fictious feelings make responsive action moot, since there is nothing that the reader can do on behalf of the character. Therefore, for Smiles, too regular consumption of novels also impedes responsive action in the real and constitutes yet another mark against fiction's utility.

---

[12] *Ibid.* p. vi.

Though Smiles does not use the word itself in this passage, those familiar with the current critical direction of affect studies and the novel might guess that what he describes as 'fictitious feeling', and 'literary pity' now largely falls under the umbrella of 'sympathy'. Today, we readily recognise the kinds of affective experiences Smiles cautions against, particularly those where emotions appear to transfer from the text to the reader, as sympathetic experiences, but this is sometimes complicated by sympathy's moralistic connotations and limited popular configurations. For example, the distinction between Smiles' word 'pity' and my substitution of 'sympathy' may seem like a small one; both terms have historically been understood as direct synonyms for one another, particularly by scholarship in the early twentieth century. But as critical interest in sympathy and literary emotion has increased in the last twenty to thirty years, so too have our ideas about sympathy as a particular type of socially encoded encounter between the self and the other.

Indeed, any simple equivalence between sympathy and pity necessarily belies the expansiveness with which sympathy was conceived, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century. Victorian notions of sympathy were extremely complex; developing out of both religious and secular humanist traditions, they provided the ideological framework through which all manner of social relationships could be understood. One of these is the conception of sympathy as a universal tangible force which converged with advancements in Newtonian physics in the late-seventeenth century, and Baruch Spinoza's concept of parallel 'cosmic' sympathy.[13] Alternatively, sympathy had long been implicated in the vernacular of Christianity, particularly in the emphasis on charity as a key theological virtue. This study is most interested in the language and practices regarding sympathy that developed out of the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly in its emphasis on sympathy as a mode of affective exchange and social management. To that end, I will be building off of a wealth of recent work on Victorian sympathy that

---

[13] Karolina Hübner, 'Spinoza's Parallelism Doctrine and Metaphysical Sympathy', in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by Eric Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 146-170, p. 146.

foregrounds the convergence of novelistic form with the linguistic structure of shared emotions as it was theorized by the moral philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith.

An object of special interest during the Enlightenment and long after, some early-Victorians recognized sympathy as not just a system of affective exchange between parties, but also as a practical mechanism through which society could be ordered. Among their other significant contributions, the legacy of moral philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith was an understanding of sympathy as the force underlying civil advancements, such that the natural sympathy between humans was viewed as proof positive of man's inherently social nature, and as a key factor in institutional progress. Sympathy encouraged the administration of justice, provided the frame for public welfare, was the origin of virtue, and above all, translated the emotional experiences of individuals into socially constructive institutions.[14] However, before the century's end, some popular depictions of the sympathetic emotions, especially the novelistic kind, seem to equate the reading experience with the sterilising emotional consumption Smiles tells his readers to avoid.

I want to read this tradition of Enlightenment sympathy through the lens of the Condition-of-England period because these novels treated the subject of sympathy as both narratively and practically significant. The Condition-of-England novels—standards that include Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) and Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866)—made the cultivation of readerly sympathy an explicit goal, often, but not exclusively, by way of inviting the identification of the implied reader with a protagonist who was also learning about the condition of the working class for the first time. In dramatizing the real social problems ushered in by rapid industrialisation, urban overcrowding, poor sanitation, and food shortages, alongside class resentment stoked by the passage of the Great Reform Act (1832) and the New Poor Law

---

[14] That being said, it is worth acknowledging that the moral philosophers did not have a utopian view of eighteenth-century British society, but rather saw sympathy as an important factor in the continual teleological movement of society toward a more morally and socially advanced state.

(1834), these novels linked the aesthetic qualities of literary emotion directly to the issue of social reform. However, some critics have viewed this as an overemphasis on the morality of feeling and individual responsibility that's inconsistent with the clearly systemic nature of the political and economic marginalisation of the Victorian working-class. Some have gone so far to suggest, in a turn oddly consistent with Smiles, that the pitiable feelings that these novels engender are the ends of aesthetic experience and, as such, preclude any real reform, individual or otherwise.

The aim of my thesis is to re-examine sympathy and its place in the debate about the Condition-of-England, while bearing in mind what remains of eighteenth-century sympathy's totalising influences; this necessarily means looking not only at the novels themselves, but also at other literature that joined sympathy to aesthetics, to social formation and directly to the language of selfhood, including the work of David Hume, Adam Smith, and Thomas Carlyle. I want to reassess the prevailing wisdom about the Victorian suspicion of the novel as a vehicle of shared emotion and as a tool for the cultivation of bourgeois morality and ethical citizenship. In so doing, I will demonstrate that even where the sympathetic sharing of emotion is constructed as a personal experience (which is by no means always the case,) these experiences can have lasting public value. This hinges upon the acknowledgement that, while sometimes a private exercise, novel-reading during the Victorian period was a way of engaging actively with public life. Public readings, circulating libraries, periodical reviews, and the novel's engagement with the pressing issues of the day are all evidence of this. Moreover, taking seriously reactionary contemporary responses to the Condition-of-England novels, especially those which frame novelistic sympathy with the working class as dangerous, complicates the view that the literary emotions were sterilising ones.

Part excavation of Victorian conceptions of sympathy and social interdependence, and part critical history of our own changing attitudes toward the political aspirations of novels, this study argues that it is impossible to deal with the Condition-of-England novels in a vacuum. Our understanding of them is now, and has always been, shaped by concurrent attitudes toward

sympathy itself; this amounts to a mutually reinforcing relationship, where the apparent failure of

the novel to translate aesthetic transformation into genuine action has traditionally been used to

demonstrate the nullifying effects of bourgeois sympathy, or feeling for the poor. But this was

not always the case. Rereading the Condition-of-England novels with the broader conception of

sympathy offered by the British moral philosophers will allow me to demonstrate the many ways

in which the Victorians imagined novel experience(s) to impinge upon public life and shape

social discourse. In this way, the combination of shared affect and comprehensive social

formation that attention to Enlightenment sympathy offers can help us to understand how the

imaginary emotions of novels could be converted into responsible social action in the real world.

Still, it is worth noting the plural and contested nature of meanings of sympathy available at the

time, and parts of this thesis will necessarily come into contact with works where the heavily

structured nature of Enlightenment sympathy cannot fully account for the artistic aims of the

novel, nor can this kind of sympathy adequately repair the structural inequalities that such texts

draw attention to.

(I) The Modern Legacy of the Condition-of-England Novel

The novels that this study is most interested in are variously referred to as the Condition-of-

England novels, the industrial novels, and/ or more broadly, Victorian social-problem novels,

depending on which aspects the critic most wants to draw attention to. In 1903 Louis Cazamian

used the term 'roman-à-thèse', or thesis novel, and compared Carlyle's social essays, Martineau's

Illustrations of Political Economy (1832) and Dickens's Christmas books, alongside *Hard Times*, *Sybil*,

Mary Barton, *North and South*, Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849), Kingsley's *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton

Locke* to illustrate the rise of interventionist fiction between 1830 and 1850—though, it should be

noted Cazamian's work was not translated into English until the 1970s.[15] While these novels

---

[15] Louis Cazamian, *The Social Novel in England, 1830-1850: Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs Gaskell, Kingsley*, trans. by Martin Fido, (London: Routlegde and Keegan Paul, 1973), p. 3.

were certainly understood by contemporary Victorian reviewers to thematize the misery of the poor, the 'Factory Question' and some amount of reader responsibility for both in similar ways, as Josephine Guy points out, it is important to note that this grouping is more or less a retrospective critical tool.[16] What these various appellations—roman-à-thèse, social-problem novel and, obliquely, Condition-of-England novel,— foreground then, is an acknowledgement that such novels share an explicit goal: that they have identified something wrong in modern life, and that the novel is both a tool of exposure and means of intervention.

For Cazamian, the Victorian social novel represented a challenge to 'the laissez-faire principles of classical economists and the liberal bourgeoise' that 'demand[ed]' 'both state and individual intervention'.[17] A commitment to realism allowed these novels to 'expose facts' about the lives of the poor in the workhouses, in the factories, and in the slums that readers would otherwise not have access to.[18] Critically, Cazamian argues that these facts-packaged-in-fiction were sufficient to work some amount of emotional and moral development in readers, which was then translated into the comparable moral development of society writ large, even if such developments could not realistically have been wholly disinterested.[19] This early phase of scholarship tended to treat social-problem novels from the mid-nineteenth century as imaginative extensions of the investigative work done by journalists like Henry Mayhew in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851), and as dramatizations of facts supplied by Parliamentary 'blue books'. Such novels, then, might reasonably be implicated in the popular support for remedial legislation like the Factory Acts and subsequent investment in public health initiatives, for novels could function as a substitute for lived experience and impart moral lessons in a way that objective reporting could not. To this end, Cazamian writes, 'when Dickens and Kingsley revealed the extent of the social distress around them, and inspired compassion for the

---

[16] Josephine Guy, *The Victorian Social Problem Novel*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 3.
[17] Cazamian, p. 3.
[18] *Ibid.* p. 6.
[19] *Ibid.* p. 13.

sufferers, they were providing their readers with actual experience, and informing their social consciousness with the feeling it had hitherto lacked'.[20] This posits that the social-problem novel is an effective conduit for lived experience first, and emotional content second. Furthermore, the 'exposure' and 'revelation' achieved in the social novel satisfies only part of the project of interventionist fiction, and readers' new sense of 'social consciousness' and 'feeling' could be, and often was, translated into tangible reforms. Key to this argument is Cazamian's suggestion above, that the novel 'demands' both individual *and* state intervention. Though several aspects of Cazamian's approach have been challenged since *The Social Novel in England* was first published, the idea that novel writing and reading could materially impact the state has been one of the most denigrated.

Indeed, this kind of argument, that positions these novels as practical agents of resistance against the rising tide of both political economy and the homogenising machine of liberal bourgeois culture has since come to be regarded as somewhat naive. More recent criticism of the novels from the 1830s, 40s and 50s has become suspicious of the didactic, expostulatory and interventionist aims that Cazamian emphasised. Such readings are underpinned by a turn in Marxist criticism that regards the novel as a tool of social control that subordinates political deviance to the comparatively safe space of domesticity, romance and individual feeling. This suggests that novels sooth, mainly through the marriage plot, the unsocial passions of the dispossessed working class and redirect political aspirations by substituting them for purely private ones. This steadfast isolation of the political from other kinds of social life is part of Nancy Armstrong's argument in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), for example, which itself has come 'under fire' of late, as, in the twenty-first century, the pendulum of literary scholarship has begun to swing back toward taking seriously the political objectives of the Condition-of-England novels.[21]

---

[20] *Ibid.* p. 6.
[21] Lee, p. 515.

Armstrong was not alone, however, in treating the political as a discrete entity, mismanaged in the realm of fiction and corroded by the marriage plot. In 1958 Raymond Williams effectively standardised the core 'Industrial novels'—*Mary Barton*, *North and South*, *Hard Times*, *Sybil*, *Alton Locke* and *Felix Holt*—which he argued, ultimately failed in their objective to engage with a new, industrial reality. Indeed, his epithet of choice, the 'industrial novels', centralizes the thematics of industrialisation over the wider societal concerns made evident by terms like 'social-problem' and 'Condition-of-England'. Of course, part of Williams's project is the evaluation of the impact of the Industrial Revolution on five core concepts transformed in the late eighteenth century from concrete entities into ideological abstractions: 'class', 'industry', 'democracy', 'art' and 'culture'.[22] That these concepts each had a social dimension did not go unnoticed by Williams, even if his focus in *Culture and Society* tended toward a more narrow version of socio-political life, as evidenced by his now famous critique of *Mary Barton*, which I too will consider in chapter three.

Williams draws attention to this 'interesting group of novels' because, he argues, these 'provide some of the most vivid descriptions of life in an unsettled industrial society, but also illustrate certain common assumptions within which the direct response was undertaken'.[23] Thus, Williams considers the quality of novelistic depictions of Victorian industrial life with an eye toward realism, alongside an analysis of what the plot resolution can tell us about Victorian responses to industrialisation. On the whole, Williams understands these novels to fail in their object by locating narrative solutions to the problem of the working classes outside of industrialism: 'the restored heiress stands, in the general picture with Margaret Thornton's legacy, with Canada and with Horse-Riding', a romantic fantasy which solves the problems created by industrialism by removing from the industrial scene.[24] Thus, for Williams the common 'direct' response to industrialisation appears to be, at best, an indirect response characterised by a wilful

---

[22] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* 1780-1950 (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 11.
[23] *Ibid.* p. 99.
[24] *Ibid.* p. 110.

blindness which shifts the gaze of the novel and the reader away from the emergent industrial reality. These novels effectively swap out the radical potential embedded in a realistic but uncomfortable portrait of the urban working class for the safety and consolation offered by more familiar narrative structures.

Even in spite of praise for George Eliot's style, intelligence, and quality of her commitment to realism, Williams notes that *Felix Holt* also fails to meaningfully engage with political reform over social reforms. Here, Williams refers to Eliot's failure to write a positively politically engaged working class, in favour of the limited amelioration of working-class degradation through sobriety, emigration and education. Eliot, he writes, falls back into prescriptions of 'patience and caution', not just for the working class of the novel, nor for the real body of people that these characters purport to represent, but also for herself as a novelist:

It is a fact that when she touches, as she chooses to touch, the lives and problems of working people, her personal observation and conclusion surrender, virtually without a fight, to the general structure of feeling about these matters which was the common property of her generation, and which she at once was too hesitant to transcend, and too intelligent to raise into any lively embodiment.[25]

What is curious in this review of *Felix Holt* is Williams's implication that Eliot's inability—which accords exactly with the novel's inability—to transcend her historical and cultural milieu is a choice. This seems to imply that Eliot's intelligence, understanding and capability as a novelist could have allowed her to resist the dominant 'structure of feeling' of the mid-nineteenth century. 'Structure of feeling' is Williams's term for the new ways of thinking emergent during periods of significant cultural transformation; he examines the changing attitudes toward his key terms in order to view the production of dominant rhetoric. In the following section, I will suggest that Victorian attitudes toward 'sympathy' could also be read as part of this structure of feeling, but this is not something Williams does. Instead, he argues that in the disappointing

---

[25] *Ibid.* p. 119.

ending of *Felix Holt*, Eliot deliberately re-establishes the status quo, either from a desire to protect her own interests, or from a lack of confidence in the working class as political subjects.

Though this kind of assertion is rendered moot by Althusser's proposition that while ISAs (ideological state apparatuses) like literary culture might appear hegemonic, they ultimately conform to dominant power structures, the stunted possibility within the social-problem novels of the mid-century remains the siren-song of literary-political critique. This idea, that the Condition-of-England novels could have been different—that Margaret Hale could have let Thornton's mill fail, that Sissy Jupe's whimsical influence could have transformed the Gradgrinds before their fall, that the second half of *Mary Barton* could have kept its focus on John, or that Felix Holt could have either bent the riot to his will, or become MP for Treby Magna—were it not for the unconscionable hesitancy of Victorian novelists, has effectively generated two camps in successive scholarship. The first emphasises failures in the novels' ability to represent the lives of a politically-engaged working class as a corollary to the novels' failure to meaningfully impact the lives of a politically-dispossessed working class, while the second seeks to reassert the unique aspects of Victorian conceptions of socio-political participation, and by reading the social-problem novels sympathetically, consider them as Cazamian does, a vehicle of a burgeoning social consciousness that need not be divorced from the culpability of the state.

In the first camp are critics like Catherine Gallagher and Rosemaire Bodenheimer, who suggest that the nature of representation and the naivete of claims to realism actually hinder polemical assertions of moral value.[26] In 1992 Elizabeth D McCausland put it like this:

their [the novelists'] political goals are inextricably bound up with a belief in language as a transparently representative medium: these authors believe both that they can have an authentic experience of working-class life [...] and that they can give readers the same experience through the language of novels or reports.[27]

---

[26] Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. xii.

[27] Elizabeth D McCausland, "Dirty Little Secrets: Realism and the Real in Victorian Industrial Novels", *The American Journal of Semiotics* (1992) 9.2, p. 149.

Realism itself is therefore implicated in the failure—for these novelists still fail to imagine a truly radical response to the industrial situation—of novels to substitute imaginary experience for actual experience. That this substitution was both naively urged by the novelists in question, and uncritically accepted in early scholarship is made evident in Cazamian's conclusions, quoted above.[28] When he writes that Dickens and Kingsley 'inspir[ed] compassion' for the poor by 'providing their readers with *actual experience* and informing their social consciousness with the feeling it had hitherto lacked,' there is a clear slippage between the real and the merely realistic. But what I find most interesting in this assertion is the implicit connection Cazamian gestures to between imaginative experiences and the development of readerly compassion and feeling. It is precisely this gap that critical attention to empathy and the novel proposes to fill, particularly when it comes to evaluating the emotional potential of imaginative experiences, which I will consider in the first chapter.

While both Cazamian and Williams are conscious that the sympathetic understanding of the poor as fellow creatures is a conspicuous aim of the Condition-of-England novels, both tend to regard sympathy uncritically, as a simple synonym for compassion constrained by a typically Victorian emphasis on Christian morality. Cazamian, for example, explicitly reasons that compassion generated by the text is a necessary precursor to political reforms. On the other hand, Williams argues that the aim of industrial fiction can be summed up as a 'recognition of evil […] balanced by a fear of becoming involved', or 'sympathy […] transformed, not into action, but into withdrawal'.[29] Interestingly, though Williams's key terms are 'class', 'industry', 'democracy', 'art' and 'culture', in the introduction to *Culture and Society* he lists nearly fifty other words that also took on new meanings in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Williams considers words like 'ideology' and 'intellectual', 'scientist' and 'romanticism', 'capitalism' and

---

[28] Gallagher, p. xii.
[29] Williams, p. 119.

'proletariat', among many others, but in spite of his phrase 'structure of feeling', his work does not consider meaningful changes to so-called 'feeling' words, the emotions, domesticity, compassion, or sympathy. This is doubly ironic given the above implication of sympathy's key role in the opportunities missed out of industrial fiction. Thus, Williams's influential critique of the industrial novels, tends to treat sympathy as a version of compassion, where feelings of pity for the working class do not translate into a like recognition of their subjectivity, but crucially this limited sympathy does not necessarily work to prevent that recognition.

However, since *Culture and Society*, the Victorian novel's characteristic sympathy with the poor has come under even greater suspicion. Some scholars, like Caroline Betensky, have argued that these novels deploy sympathetic depictions of the poor strategically, as a mode of managing class relations, where the novel deposits feelings into the middle-class reader so that caring eclipses doing.[30] To an extent, Betensky treats these novels as Williams does, as a way for middle-class novelists and readers to experience the kind of deprivation that their status as part of the ruling class ordinarily insulates them from. There is also some correlation between Betensky's treatment of sympathy as a feeling in and of itself, that gratified and reinforced middle-class dominance through its connections to morality, and Williams's understanding of sympathy converted into withdrawal. But I think that these arguments do not deal with Victorian sympathy in all of its fullness, and are not served by the premise that the Condition-of-England novels were either unsuccessful prompts to reform, or practical obstacles to it.

Even so, as Brigid Lowe usefully points out in her book *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy* (2007), scepticism of novelistic sympathy in 'contemporary politico-literary criticism' has remained a popular in-road in Victorian literary scholarship.[31] Lowe, I think rightly, challenges the notion that 'studying literature out of a conviction that it may have some

---

[30] Caroline Betensky, *Feeling for the Poor: Bourgeois Compassion, Social Action and the Victorian Novel,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), p. 7.

[31] Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: An Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, (London: Anthem Press, 2007), p. 3.

particular merit' upholds a '"middle-class construction of reality",' to which the only antidote is to 'demonstrate that […] "literary" texts […] are no more and no less than ideology given a long and humanist name'.[32] One variety of resistance to this outlook that Lowe identifies is a propensity in recent scholarship to treat the radical potential of some novelistic politics as purely a production of critics who read subversion into texts against the grain of authorial intention. But Lowe also rejects this approach, writing 'there is something patronising in the concession that though novels may be oppressive, *we* can make something of them despite their best efforts'.[33] Rather, Lowe argues that we ought to read the Victorian novel, and treat the historical past, sympathetically, by which she means acknowledging what can only be a mutual failure to live beyond the political and intellectual constraints of our respective historical moments. This approach, Lowe writes, allows critics the space to engage with these novels in good faith and take seriously the claims that they do make. Thus, we shouldn't read these novels as either a retreat into the status quo, or as a vehicle of withdrawing sympathy, but as practical dramatizations of Victorian ideas about sociability and kinds of political engagement that are not equivalent with our own.

Indeed, this more sympathetic approach to the Condition-of-England novel is visible in criticism that foregrounds the historicization of Victorian social ideals. Some recurring elements in this vein of criticism are descriptions of the ways in which Victorian perceptions about the individual, society, and the role of imaginative literature in political and private life are historically unique expressions. From Guy's *The Victorian Social-Problem Novel* (1996) and Constance Harsh's *Subversive Heroines* (1994) to Chris R. Vanden Bossche's *Reform Acts* (2014), modern scholarship, enabled in part by a wave of feminist criticism throughout the 70s and 80s, has attempted to redeem the narrative solutions to the problem of industrial life by advancing Victorian rhetorical and ideological frameworks that centred engagement with these issues within larger structures of

---

[32] Lowe, pp. 3-4.
[33] *Ibid.* p. 8.

sociability. This is to say that the apparent substitution of political resolution (i.e. Chartist successes, or enfranchisement) for social resolution (i.e. 'mutual understanding' and the yoking of class to class via marriage) is not truly a substitution at all. Rather, within the conceptual framework open to the Victorians, these social solutions enabled individual agency which, understood optimistically, could transcend what we only now recognise as structural inequality.[34]

I find this approach appealing for its more generous view of the aims of Victorian novelists and social reformers, and because it provides an answer to Williams's critique of Eliot. It seems clear to me that these novelists could not imagine a way of completely reordering a social structure which already seemed to be in tumult. Nor am I much perturbed by the novel's treatment of the individual, or family circle as the microcosm of society writ large, because the novels I want to reassess don't seem to suggest that individual charity is a sufficient substitute for institutional change. Charles Egremont, for example, takes his new-found social consciousness to parliament, and Margaret Hale invests in Thornton's proposed model mill, rather than continue to live comfortably in London performing individual acts of charity. Moreover, it is my contention that reading the language of sympathy as it is employed by these novels recentres the role of personal feeling within broader social structures and can illuminate the ways in which sympathy was an action unto itself, not only a feeling to be transformed.

That being said, there is a correlation between sympathetic depictions of the working class which foreground the need for greater institutional reform and the conception that literary emotions might be dangerous to readers, as in the case of Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong*. Novelistic sympathy that openly transgressed class boundaries and was not focalised through the middle-class spectator tended to be met with greater resistance, and actually inhibited the sympathetic experiences that the novel was offering. Alternatively, novels where the sympathetic feelings of the middle-class interventionist were foregrounded were better received at the time; a

---

[34] Chris R Vanden Bossche, *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency and the Victorian Novel 1832 – 1867*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 3.

familiar example of this is the difference in the critical response to *Mary Barton* versus *North and South*. Interestingly, where Victorian reviewers were largely gratified by Gaskell's shift from the controversial John Barton to the intervening Margaret Hale, modern critics tend to be disappointed by this redirection which has been construed as radicalism unrealised.

For these reasons, I think it worth clarifying what precisely we mean when we talk about Victorian sympathy, especially the novelistic kind. Literary studies have long considered these novels to be sympathetic toward the working class and toward social reform, but haven't always been consistent in defining sympathy, as I have shown above. Thus, my study is informed by some of the recent work in affect studies that has delved into Victorian sympathy more deeply and has brought together issues of narrative structure with the compulsion to feel along certain lines.

(II) Novelistic Sympathy, a New Approach

Since Suzanne Keen's influential exploration of the relationship between fiction, the emotions and altruism in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), there has been a significant expansion in critical thinking regarding sympathy, emotion and the Victorians, especially with regard to the novel as an instrument of sharable passions. Rachel Ablow explains this 'explosion' of interest in affect studies as largely the result of three convergent trends: (1) feminists critics in the 1980s taking seriously 'a broader range of […] women's and sentimental fiction', (2) Foucault's argument in *The History of Sexuality* (1976) that the emotions we feel are not individual expressions, but locate us in a particular time and place in history, and (3) Althusser's recognition of literature as another ISA, one that constitutes the reader as a subject endowed with 'a quasi-real hallucinatory

individuality'.[35] It is this last point in particular, Ablow suggests, that has also led to a comparable trend amongst scholars to regard 'literary emotion,' like Smiles does, 'with suspicion'.[36]

In the wider world beyond literary studies, sympathy still tends to be distinguished from its close relative, empathy. The latter is a relatively new concept, only coined in 1873; it is the English translation of the German compound word, *Einfühlung*, or to 'feel into'.[37] Initially, empathy, like its German counterpart, was used to describe a particular kind of aesthetic relationship between art objects and the viewer, but this quickly expanded into the relational affective framework we recognise as 'empathy' today.[38] Suzanne Keen, for example, defines empathy as the 'vicarious, spontaneous *sharing* of affect,' highlighting its cooperative implications.[39] Where sympathy is often reduced to feeling *for* the object, empathy is more often used to mean feeling along *with* the object. For some, this distinction has meant empathy is a more egalitarian practice than its older counterpart, and that its self-effacement implies a radical potency which commonplace associations of sympathy with pity and compassion don't seem to match.

But sympathy is indeed a much older concept than its young cousin, and, historically has been defined by terms virtually synonymous with modern empathy. Lately, a turn in affect studies has emphasised the contributions of Enlightenment philosophers, particularly that of Adam Smith, who long before 1873, described *sympathy* as the experience of fellow-feeling. For this reason, recent trends in affective studies have tended to place less emphasis on apparent differences between sympathy and empathy, and, occasionally, use both terms interchangeably. In fact, some critics of the nineteenth-century novel consciously use the word sympathy over empathy, even while acknowledging their significant conceptual overlap; Rae Greiner, for

---

[35] Rachel Ablow, "Victorian Feeling and the Victorian Novel", *Literature Compass*, 4.1, (2007), 298-316, p. 298.
[36] Ablow, p. 299.
[37] John Gibson, 'Empathy', in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Literature*, (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 235.
[38] Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J Kim, 'Introduction', *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 5.
[39] Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 4.

example, writes that 'sympathy' is the more appropriate term within the period of study, and is really the better choice because of it.

    And it is true that sympathy flourished as a topic of keen interest for the novel, especially as the Romantic period waned and Victoria's reign began. As a superficial example of this trend, the table below tracks the frequency with which the root word 'sympath' occurs in some of the major novels published up to and throughout the long nineteenth century.[40] Here, we see that 'sympathy' was a term not often used by seventeenth-century novelists, though admittedly, only a small sample of work is represented here. It also wasn't much discussed by the novels of the Regency period either, at least not when compared against the Victorian average use.

---

[40] I compiled this data by first using the Ctrl + F search function on digital formatted text (HTML) editions of my chosen novels hosted on ProjectGutenberg .com. This allowed me to get a quick (and usually accurate) figure for each corresponding document because the digital transcription is completely searchable for word parts through keyboard commands. Searching for the root 'sympath' threw back results for all of its occurrences in the text in a single function, easily finding the root in more complicated word forms (like 'unsympathetically',) but also accounting for any localised spelling discrepancies in different editions ('sympathise', versus 'sympathize', for example). But, because Project Gutenberg does not transcribe specific editions, there were a few occurrences of additional paratext included alongside the novel which skewed the figures. The Project Gutenberg version of *Alton Locke*, for example, also includes an introduction to the text, several 'Parson Lot' letters, and Kingsley's 'Cheap Clothes and Nasty' before the text of the novel itself and skewed the resulting figure for that novel. However, where novels included prefaces, epigrams or notes provided by the author and published in the original text, I have counted their use of sympathy-words. To be sure that my accounting was accurate, I then confirmed the Project Gutenberg results by comparing them against scanned copies of the novels hosted on Hathitrust.org. When choosing which edition to compare against, since the Hathitrust digital library often has several holdings for each title, I usually selected the earliest available as full-text, except when the earliest version was a multi-volume set. I tried to use single volumes simply for ease of searchability, time efficiency, and increased accuracy, but in some cases, like that of Disraeli's *Sybil*, only the triple-decker was available. In each indicated edition, I manually verified the Project Gutenberg results and amended errors where necessary.

'Sympath' Words in the Nineteenth-Century Novel

Publication Year	Title	Author	Edition Searched (all cross-referenced against plain text published by Project Gutenberg)	# of Instances of 'Sympath*' (-y, -ies, -etic, -ize, -ise, -ised, izes, etc. and prefix un)
1719	*Robinson Crusoe*	Daniel Defoe	(London, W Taylor: 1719) ; *Project Gutenberg* updated 2021	0
1740	*Pamela*	Samuel Richardson	In *The Works of Samuel Richardson*, Vol. 1, (London, Henry Sotheron and Co: 1883); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2018	0
1778	*Evelina*	Frances Burney	(London, Harrsion: 1861); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2018	7
1798	*Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman*	Mary Wollstonecraft	*Project Gutenberg* updated 2016	20
1811	*Sense and Sensibility*	Jane Austen	(London, Richard Bentley: 1833); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2021)	7
1817	*Persuasion*	Austen	In *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. by Brimley Johnson, (London, J M Dent and Co: 1895); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2015	8
1818	*Frankenstein*	Mary Shelley	(London, George Routledge and Sons: 1891); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2020	35
1820	*Ivanhoe*	Walter Scott	(Chicago, Scott Foresman and Co: 1899); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2021)	8
1826	*Vivian Grey*	Benjamin Disraeli	(London, John Lane, The Bodley Head: 1906); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2021)	8
1836	*The Pickwick Papers*	Charles Dickens	(New York, Hurd and Houghton: 1867); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2020	20
1839	*Oliver Twist*	Dickens	(New York, Hurd and Houghton: 1867); Project Gutenberg updated 2021	5
1841	*Barnaby Rudge*	Dickens	(London, Macmillan and Co: 1906); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2016	28
1844	*Coningsby*	Disraeli	In Three Volumes, (London, Henry Colburn: 1844); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2017	59
1845	*Sybil*	Disraeli	(London, Macmillan and Co: 1895); *Project Gutenberg Updated 2016*	46
1847	*Tancred*	Disraeli	In Three Volumes, (London, Henry Colburn: 1847); Project Gutenberg updated 2016	55
1847	*Wuthering Heights*	Emily Bronte	(London, Hodder and Stoughton: 1911); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2022	17
1847	*Jane Eyre*	Charlotte Bronte	(London, Smith, Elder and Co: 1869); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2020	31
1847	*Vanity Fair*	WM Thackery	(London, J M Dent and Sons: 1936); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2015)	33
1848	*Mary Barton*	Elizabeth Gaskell	(New York, The Century Co: 1907); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2013	55
1850	*Alton Locke*	Charles Kingsley	(New York, Harper and Brothers: 1858); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2014	25
1853	*Bleak House*	Dickens	(London, Hurd and Houghton: 1870); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2012	22
1854	*Hard Times*	Dickens	(London, Chapman and Hall: 1905)	5
1855	*North and South*	Gaskell	(New York, Harper and Brothers: 1866); Project Gutenberg updated 2021	53
1857	*Scenes of Clerical Life*	George Eliot	(New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons; 1906); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2006	40
1859	*The Woman in White*	Wilkie Collins	(London, Collins Clear Type Press: 1866); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2014	46
1866	*Felix Holt, the Radical*	Eliot	(Boston, Dana Estes and Company: 1889); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2022	21
1866	*Wives and Daughters*	Gaskell	(New York, Harper and Brothers: 1866); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2011	61
1868	*The Moonstone*	Collins	In Three Volumes (London, Tinsley Brothers: 1868); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2019	13
1872	*Middlemarch*	Eliot	(New York, John Wanamaker: 1889); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2021	36
1882	*Treasure Island*	Robert Louis Stephenson	(New York, Charles E Merrill Co: 1909); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2020	1
1890	*The Picture of Dorian Gray*	Oscar Wilde	(New York, Brentanos: 1913); Project Gutenberg updated 2021	12
1891	*Tess of the D'urbervilles*	Thomas Hardy	(New York, A L Burt and Company: 1921); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2021	9
1895	*Jude the Obscure*	Hardy	(New York, Harper and Brothers: 1898); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2020	16
1915	*The Voyage Out*	Virginia Woolf	(New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co: 1920); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2021	21
1925	*Mrs Dalloway*	Woolf	(New York, Harcourt, Brace and World: 1925); *Project Gutenberg* updated 2002	4

Barring some notable exceptions, Wollstonecraft's *Maria* and Shelley's *Frankenstein* among them (I will leave it to the reader to consider what about these two particular novels make them more interested in 'sympathy' than other novels published around the same time,) there is a measurable upward trend in the use of the word sympathy, and its near relations, from just before the mid-century onward.

Seeing the frequency with which sympathy-words were used in Victorian novels also provides some interesting points of comparison when we look at the work of a single author. For example, comparing Benjamin Disraeli's first novel in the silver-fork school, *Vivian Grey* (1826), against his trio of political novels of the 1840s, shows a sudden large boost to the frequency with which sympathy-words were used; *Vivian Grey* only mentioned sympathy and its conjugates eight times, whereas such terms appear an average of fifty times in Disraeli's social-problem novels. The novels of Charles Dickens, however, use 'sympath' less consistently; he only uses the root five times each in *Oliver Twist* (1839) and *Hard Times* (1854), but twenty or more times in *Pickwick Papers* (1836) and *Bleak House* (1853). Taking these two points together demonstrates that the mid-century didn't simply usher in a new generation of novelists more interested in sympathy than the previous generation, nor did it mean that sympathy was a consistently growing point of concern for the novel. The data simply shows that overall, more novels of the middle decades used the language of sympathy more often than the novels before or after tended to. Of course, this data on its own is only so valuable; the number of times that sympathy is mentioned does not really measure how *sympathetic* a text is, or the extent to which it invites the reader's participation in specific emotions. What this does demonstrate, though, is that from the late 1830s, sympathy was becoming something worth writing *about*.

Another thing this kind of data can't account for is *how* sympathy-words were being used in context. This is an issue of concern because even today, we still use sympathy in a number of different ways, and not only as a synonym for pity. For example, our 'sympathies' might be engaged by that which we have affection for, or we might say that we sympathise with the point

of view of another to indicate general agreement, more than an affective experience as such. 'Unsympathetic' might indicate that someone else is unfeeling. Alternatively, the same word could be used to indicate that they are unlikeable, or impossible to for us sympathise with. Beyond that, like the Smiles' example above, there are certainly instances when novels describe affective experiences (where the emotions are engaged either *for* or *with* the object) where sympathy-words are not used at all. And this inconsistency also applies to literary scholarship's treatment of sympathy.

When we acknowledge that a work is sympathetic, particularly in reference to novels of the mid-century, we still often refer to its deliberate cultivation of readerly compassion. Indeed, it would be distinctly disingenuous, in making a case for a deeper understanding of sympathy, to argue that novels like *Oliver Twist* (1839) do not prompt feelings of pity for young Oliver simply because the world 'sympathy' is used less often than in *Bleak House* (1853). Hence, we recognise that some novels strategically deploy representations in order to develop readerly feelings *for* an other positioned somewhere outside of—and usually more vulnerable than—the self.

At other times, we take for granted the Victorian use of 'sympathy' as a kind of shorthand for mutual understanding and critical insight. Narratives like *Middlemarch* (1872) and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) reveal the origins of character motivation and in so doing, render the interiority of the other not only accessible, but legible. To read sympathetically, then, is to recognise in the other that which resembles the self, and from there to endeavour to look charitably on even the selfish origins of action. To achieve this degree of understanding of our fellows, then, is to reserve our judgement, and to treat them with the generosity of spirit that we hope for when our own foibles obscure our better nature. And in understanding the other's situation we open ourselves up to their emotions as well. Scholars even outside of affective studies have long recognised that the fiction of George Eliot has explicitly demanded this kind of sympathetic understanding from its readers, and that it is the first step in her invitation to feeling along *with* the other. But it is significant that feeling *for* the other is not mutually exclusive from

feeling *with* them, or vice versa, as these limited examples might suggest. Rather, it usually goes without saying that when we talk about sympathy in the Victorian novel generally, we refer to both of these experiences simultaneously. Novelistic sympathy, then, is the convergence of compassionate representations with the attempt to ethically consider the subjectivity of the other.

In addition to this, the language of sympathy has been increasingly called on to help define the imaginative processes at work *during* the experience of literary emotions. Particularly as Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) has been reconsidered by critics, sympathy has come to represent the imaginative exercise by which emotional transference from the other (or the text) to the self seems to occur. In short, according to Smith, the experience of sympathetic emotions requires the telescopic projection of the self into the other's experiences. This framework has, naturally, proven useful to scholarship invested in the novel's relationship to the affects, and undergirds the work of Audrey Jaffe's *Scenes of Sympathy* (2003), Rae Greiner's *Sympathetic Realism* (2012) and Jeanne M Britton's *Vicarious Narratives* (2019), among many other recent contributions to Victorian studies. For some, the sudden dominance of Smith in studies of sympathy seems to have upheld the initial premises of Keen's work; they suggest that novels can and do produce feeling subjects who might be able to act on those feelings in the real— Keen suggests the empathetic reader might become more 'altruistic'.[41] Although, to be clear, Keen does distinguish between empathy as a stimulant to extroverted moral action, and sympathy as introverted emotional distress.[42] Alternatively, Greiner and Britton both connect Victorian sympathy to novelistic form, foregrounding the imaginative work novel-reading requires and thematises.

Furthermore, emphasising the arguments of Adam Smith, usually alongside those of his friend David Hume, introduces an entirely new, or rather very old, series of connections between

---

[41] Keen, p. 4.
[42] *Ibid.* p. 4.

the emotions, public life, state authority, justice, self-love and political economy that sympathy has always been implicated in. These works tell us 'sympathy' describes not only the experience of another's emotions but is the gelling-agent that assembles society itself from a set of seemingly disparate individuals, which I think, provides useful insight into the above-mentioned set of Victorian conceptions that treats the individual as the elementary unit of society.

This is all to say, that by opening up Victorian novelistic sympathy to modern scrutiny, we necessarily complicate matters, and what we mean, or even what the Victorians might have meant, by the word 'sympathy' becomes increasingly difficult to pin down. I have tried to disentangle some of the many threads that make up the rich and textured fabric of sympathy as it comes to be portrayed in the Victorian novel to give some of the necessary background for my study. Going forward, these threads are necessarily fuzzy, ill-defined, and interwoven. I want to suggest that to really get at Victorian novelistic sympathy we must hold all of these distinct meanings in our heads at once, because this multiplicity is a defining feature *of* sympathy, rather than a failure of translation. I argue it is important to think about how the Victorians used sympathy as a word and as an aesthetic tool alongside changing conceptions about sympathy as the origin of society itself. This can help account for why the literary emotions are implicated in *both* narratives of social construction and justice as well as narratives of societal collapse.

In my first chapter, I want to take a look at the moment of transition from the late-eighteenth century into the early-nineteenth century, and how the relationship between sympathy and the make-up of society was theorized. The first half of the chapter will lay much of the foundation for this study by examining the philosophical basis for sympathy as it was posited by moral philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith. For my purposes, and to get a clearer picture of how sympathy as it was conceived of by the moral philosophers converged with some of the formal developments and social divisions within Condition-of-England novels, I want to focus firstly on the common elements in their competing models of sympathy. These include sympathy as society's main organising principle, as a corollary to justice, as the framework of an

economically and socially aspirational relationship between subjects, and as a natural by-product of the reader's interaction with art objects. These fundamental characteristics of sympathy are consistent across the work of both Smith and Hume and inform the underlying principles of significant nineteenth-century thinkers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. But I would be remiss if I did not address the critical ways in which Smith's sympathy diverges from Hume's, particularly with regard to the potency of emotions, the role of the spectator and the maintenance of bourgeois decorum.

Smith's version of sympathy in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is generally thought to supersede and positively develop Hume's version of sympathy in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). I want to suggest that this is not just because Smith's *Moral Sentiments* came after (and in many ways was a direct response to Hume's teachings), but also because Smith's template for sympathetic identification appears to be consistent with developments in narrative structure and to presuppose the form of the novel. This has been the subject of much recent scholarly interest, including the work of Greiner and Britton mentioned above. I am partially convinced by this insofar as I agree there is correlation between the processes Smith describes and the formal work of the novel; but there are also many aspects of the nineteenth-century novel that refuse to map neatly on to Smith's template; these require serious consideration, rather than dismissal as aberrations. Certainly, some of these novels will converge neatly with Smith's system, but others diverge, revert to Hume's system or challenge the perceived social value of sympathy altogether. Using a closed set of novels, with some small amount of inherent consistency of vision, brings these other inconsistencies into sharper relief.

In the second half of the chapter, I will introduce Thomas Carlyle's 'Condition-of-England question' as posed in 1839.[43] In many ways Carlyle is the bridge between the Enlightenment thinkers and early Victorian novelists. Here, I want to suggest that both the

---

[43] Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism*, in *'Chartism' and 'Past and Present'*, (London, Chapman and Hall: 1858), p. 9.

historical fact, and subsequent literary representations of the French Revolution underpin Carlyle's depictions of emotional transference and his formal deployment of narrative sympathy. Though Carlyle himself is not really a novelist, I argue that the form of his Condition-of-England question anticipates later novelistic responses to it by baking-in specific attitudes toward working-class political consciousness—practically through the absence of working-class voices, and a comprehensive rejection of violence. I will read Carlyle's deployment of the body politic and the diseased social body in *Chartism* alongside *The French Revolution: A History* (1837) to suggest that Hume's contagion-theory of emotional transference is key to Carlyle's depiction of working-class civil unrest, while the narrative's implied sympathies more closely align with Smith's rational sympathy. Still, the 'mob' and sympathy (even the dangerous, contagious kind) are both critical to Carlyle's polemic; while he certainly views the French Revolution as a necessary precursor to modernity, he also positions the affective transformation made possible by the text as an essential lesson of its horrors.

The second chapter examines Benjamin Disraeli's conception of sympathy as it is represented in his social-problem, and explicitly political, novel *Sybil* (1845). I argue that Disraeli's sympathy internalises and narrativizes the convergent aspects of Hume, Smith and Carlyle's sympathetic deployment. Disraeli's sympathy has clear national import, as Egremont's bildungsroman dramatizes not only his political maturation, but the remedial application of sympathetic institutionalism to the ills of English society. Like some of the later novels of this period, Disraeli lights on the system of political economy and the increased political power of the middle class as the cause of English national dis-ease. However, Disraeli's novelisations are unlike others in the Condition-of-England set in that his sympathy is comparatively disembodied. In *Sybil*, Disraeli essentially rewrites Carlyle's *French Revolution*, replacing Carlyle's metaphor of bodily disfigurement with a more straight-forward critique of working-class claims to political self-determination. Additionally, he casts Egremont's sympathetic transformation into

an enlightened aristocrat as an imaginative exercise that results in Egremont's enhanced *vision*. This affords Egremont literal clarity of sight and figurative clarity of political ambition.

It is clear that the novel's conclusion imagines a like transformation in the reader, where the novel itself figures as an educational text and supplement to lived experience. This departs significantly from Smiles' view of novels as a 'pernicious' substitution for healthful lived experiences. Moreover, because the conclusion also demands political action, Disraeli's novel does display some radical ideas about the nature and tangible possibilities of 'fictitious feelings'. This is important to point out because *Sybil* has long been understood as one of the most socially conservative of the Condition-of-England novels due to its absolute denial of working-class political subjectivity and admiration for the monastic system. Still, Disraeli's conviction at the end of *Sybil* is significant because it positions the novel as an agent of positive personal reformation with the potential to transform actual institutions—even though some of that belief had already dried up by the time he finished *Tancred* two years later.[44] Unfortunately, Young England, the real political party Disraeli pitched at the end of the novel, was both short-lived and largely ineffective, and dramatically out of scale with Egremont's promise. But it is the novel's understanding of itself in this earlier period that I am most interested in. This is worth reckoning with because the novel is a fundamentally sympathetic medium that facilitates the affective experience of the reader and because the insight that *Sybil* offers is explicitly tied to (imagined) institutional reform.

In my third chapter I will turn to a less familiar novel from the period, Frances Milton Trollope's *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (1840). In this earliest Condition-of-England novel, Trollope unusually appears to advocate for the legitimate enfranchisement of the working class. In positing working-class claims to self-determination as constitutionally legitimate, Trollope contests the conclusions of Disraeli's *Sybil* from apparently

---

[44] Jennifer Conary, "Dreaming Over an Unattainable End": Disraeli's *Tancred* and the Failure of Reform, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 38.1, (2010), 75-88, p. 75.

unassailable ground, pre-empting his later claims about working-class incivility. However, this strategy fatally contains Trollope's working class within a bourgeois framework of legitimate political activity and her novelistic sympathy is limited by this same frame. Protagonist Mary Brotherton's sympathy for the titular factory boy is awakened during a dramatization of apparent paternalistic bourgeois intervention on behalf of the vulnerable working-class child. Michael's failure to effectively perform gratitude, or praise for his benefactor, is rightly interpreted by Brotherton as a failure of bourgeois interventionism to accurately discern, diagnose or facilitate working-class desires. Despite this recognition, throughout the remainder of the novel Brotherton assumes the role of middle-class interventionist, at times as a model for the implied reader and at others as a stand-in for the sympathetic novelist. The novel hinges upon the parallel adventures of Mary Brotherton as she attempts to rescue Michael from his circumstances, and Michael's efforts to save himself, and the fact that Michael escapes the factory system without the assistance of Brotherton makes this novel one of the most unusual of its kind. But Trollope's authorial sympathy is ultimately unsustainable, and results in the publication of *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong* as a single volume, sequestering Michael's potential subversion of class-based sympathy within his non-threatening childhood.

This novel is interesting for another reason; its portrayal of sympathetic insight as a measure of character virtue adheres to some old-fashioned romantic ideals, especially when contrasted against the high realism of the 1850s and 60s, but these character portraits coupled with contemporary reactions to Trollope's novel speak to prevalent ideas about the tangible effects of sympathy *outside* of the novel. On one hand, the reader can safely identify with Trollope's 'good' characters and condemn the 'bad' ones based on their sensitivity to the feelings of others, and their responses to those feelings. Mary, for example, is good because she is able to 'read' Michael's distress, and endeavours to help him. The villainous mill-owner, Sir Matthew Dowling, is bad because his selfishness closes him off from all meaningful social bonds. He cannot even accept the love of his dutiful Cordelia-like daughter, Martha. As a result, Dowling

dies poor, infirm and mad, unrepentant and unredeemed. It is the same basic outcome of Trollope's anti-slavery novel—published just four years before *Michael Armstrong*—arguing that there are some institutions which cannot be gently reformed, even by the virtuous outsider; they can only be abolished. While this conviction was praised in reviews of Trollope's anti-slavery novel, her like treatment of the Factory Question became a serious cause for concern and disavowal.

Elizabeth Gaskell's two industrial novels, *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), are the main objects of consideration in chapter four because they intersect nicely with some of my arguments related to *Michael Armstrong* and forecast some of the developments to novelistic sympathy later made by George Eliot. Gaskell's narrators make a number of interventions, especially in *Mary Barton*, that work to direct readerly sympathies in ways that anticipate Eliot's omniscient narrator, as does the sophistication of characterisation and the novel's natural movement toward romantic resolution. *North and South*, on the other hand, thematises the interventions of the middle-class woman in an industrial landscape in a style reminiscent of Trollope's Mary Brotherton, and in both cases, charitable activity alone is shown to be an insufficient substitution for working-class participation in institutional reform. I also want to think about the relationship between Gaskell's two industrial novels. Of the Condition-of-England genre, these two are probably the most familiar to readers—excepting, perhaps Dickens's *Hard Times*—and are the only two novels published by the same author regularly included in the group. For this reason, the way that we approach these novels is necessarily informed by a long-standing critical tradition.

In the first section of the chapter, I will follow on from the method established in the preceding chapter and read some contemporary reviews of *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. Doing so, will help to shed light on the critical inheritance of these novels which has tended to read *North and South* as a righting of the wrongs of *Mary Barton*. By reading these reviews, I also hope to demonstrate how the emotional content of these novels contributed to their overall

reception in the periodical press, so that the manifestation of physical suffering as emotional suffering that troubled readers of *Mary Barton* was systematically expunged from *North and South*. Consequently, twentieth-century criticism of the novel, which tended to prefer the radical implications of *Mary Barton's* centring of working-class experiences, has also tended toward an inverse disappointment in the security of that novel's conclusion and *North and South*'s literal investment in the benevolent middle-class. More recently, criticism has sought to redeem *North and South,* as well as the second half of Mary Barton for politics, and I, too, want to point out what's missed out of responses to *North and South* that are mollified (or disappointed) by the move away from the industrial working-class. I will show that *North and South* centralises money-matters and the 'theories of trade,' of which knowledge is disavowed in the preface to *Mary Barton*, and the (often sexist) ways that this knowledge is presumed mutually exclusive from novelistic sympathy.[45]

In my second section, I will demonstrate how Thornton's statement at the end of *North and South* about the role of institutions and personal contact in the development of class attachments could be productively read as a refashioning of Enlightenment sympathetic ideals. I will argue that materiality is central to Gaskell's cultivation of sympathetic experiences and affective transformation, as is made evident by Thornton's 'actual personal contact', and anecdotally in some of the key scenes in *Mary Barton* (the tea-party, Davenport's cellar, and John's death-bed, for example).[46] I have already suggested that Gaskell's novels make the argument that sympathy is necessary to social cohesion, and, interestingly, to economic prosperity which essentially reproduces the system conceived by Hume and Smith. However, there is a significant difference in how *North and South* reconceived the personal vulnerability inherent in 'actual personal contact'; where *Mary Barton*'s sick and starving bodies infect those around them with unsocial passions, *North and South*'s positioning of Margaret as a proxy-reader

---

[45] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed. by Macdonald Daly, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 4.
[46] Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. by Patricia Ingham, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 421.

goes some way to forestalling too potent affective transmission. To round off this chapter, and think more critically about the legacy of Enlightenment sympathy in the nineteenth century, I will end this chapter by gesturing to some of the ways that Gaskell's novels resist the totalising, secular blueprints offered by Smith and Hume.

Before concluding my study, I want to spend a little time thinking about how George Eliot's fictions transform the ways that literary criticism has viewed the role of novelistic sympathy in the Victorian social-problem novel. Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1867) acts as a useful coda of sorts to both this study and to the Condition-of-England period as a whole. It is the final novel of the genre, but, in a characteristic move for Eliot, is set a generation earlier, and therefore, looks back across the whole of the period from a useful critical vantage point. Moreover, Eliot's fiction can also be used to reassess the dominance of Enlightenment sympathy in recent studies of the Victorian novel, as her understanding of sympathy clearly developed out of alternative traditions from continental Europe.

The relationship between realism and the sympathetic understanding is a well-known feature of Eliot's fiction and is an explicit concern of her earliest imaginative literature, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) and *Adam Bede* (1859). But it is worth noting that *Felix Holt*'s working-class characters are not offered as potential sites for sympathetic identification. In this respect *Felix Holt* more closely resembles Disraeli's *Sybil* than either of Gaskell's industrial novels. I will argue that the novel's emphasis on Esther's sympathetic awakening need not forestall its political plot, but that the political plot centres on the experience of the middle class over the working class. While Eliot clearly sees sympathy as serving a social function and contributing to the common good, rhetorically locating sympathy as a corollary to embodied human experience moves the language of sympathy fully away from the conceptions of the moral philosophers.

Sympathy and the Social-Nexus; David Hume, Adam Smith and Thomas Carlyle

The word 'sympathy' is derived from the Greek compound 'fellow-feeling' and has existed conceptually in one form or another dating back at least as far as the Platonic dialogues.[47] Despite the simplicity and appeal of the translation 'fellow-feeling', which remains a commonly used synonym for sympathy, this should not suggest that modern configurations of sympathy were present in the Greco-Roman tradition and have simply been passed down to us unchanged. The popularity of the term, its colloquial usage and technical denotation, like many terms used to describe the invisible forces that bind otherwise disparate objects, have undergone many stages of alteration throughout the intervening centuries.

Indeed, sympathy has had an *in*consistent meaning across time, variously invoked to describe gravitational-like forces of attraction between bodies (celestial and otherwise), the drawing effects of antidotes on poisons, the working of parts of an object (animal or vegetable) toward a single common end, and most commonly, to describe human relationships.[48] Though it has almost always been a concept in western philosophy, the significance, popularity and specificity of sympathy has varied considerably over time. The word itself does not even appear in English sources until 1567, and despite appearing with more frequency by the end of the century, remained at the peripheries of philosophical interest.[49] In the seventeenth century, Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza began describing sympathy as a social phenomenon distinct from 'love' which could explain the seeming passage of emotions between individuals. Although the meaning of sympathy continued to be malleable, especially when it came to explaining the process of *how* sympathetic attachments occurred, Spinoza's theories were instrumental in concretising sympathy as a vehicle of shared emotion.

---

[47] Eric Schliesser, 'Introduction', *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by E. Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 3.

[48] Ann E. Moyer, 'Sympathy and the Renaissance', *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by E. Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 93.

[49] *Ibid.* p. 72.

By the next century, sympathy had not only passed into accepted terminology in English but had become an object of keen interest among the moral philosophers. It has been suggested, I think rightly, that part of the reason sympathy became the dominant mode for describing the foundations of social relationships in the eighteenth century was the need to find new ways of underpinning those relationships in the wake of the 'seismic' changes to Britain's institutions brought on during the Industrial Revolution. [50] In the on-going debate about how societies organise themselves, the language of sympathy offered thinkers an alternative to long-standing assumptions that privileged man's self-interest and self-love by excluding genuine, disinterested 'fellow-feeling'. In the significant output regarding sympathy by the moral philosophers, we can read the anxiety induced as Britain became increasingly industrialised and mercantile and traditional hierarchies wavered. Seizing upon sympathy as one of the natural forces that unconsciously binds society, the moral philosophers could allay fears that human relationships would become vulnerable to the self-serving marketplace.[51]

This anxiety about the precarity of human relationships in the face of industrialisation and market-driven self-interest persists well into the nineteenth century, where the language of sympathy extends beyond philosophical treatises to be taken up in the novel and the periodical press. While the work of moral philosophers generations earlier, particularly prominent figures like David Hume and Adam Smith, continued to be influential in contrasting sympathetic relationships against market relationships, it is important to remember that sympathy was being continuously reinterpreted in the nineteenth-century context, and often without direct reference to this earlier work. This is not to suggest, however, that the fundamental tenets of the sympathetic process articulated by Hume, Smith and their contemporaries did not significantly impact the sympathetic thought of the nineteenth century; they did. In fact, many of the core principles underpinning the process of sympathy (for example, the conception of sympathy as

---

[50]Ryan Patrick Hanley, 'The Eighteenth-Century Context of Sympathy from Spinoza to Kant', *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by E. Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 173.
[51] *Ibid.* p. 174.

process, rather than *emotion*) derive from the work of these thinkers, even in instances of nineteenth-century misreading and resistance. Thus, in parsing the sympathetic invocations of nineteenth-century prose, it is necessary to walk a fine line between recognising ideas inherited from thinkers like Smith and Hume, and the unique expressions of the early-Victorians.

In getting at the accepted and pervasive aspects of Victorian sympathy, it is, at times, necessary to paint in broad strokes with reference to these inherited configurations. Of course, Hume and Smith, and even earlier figures like Spinoza, were not always in complete agreement about what was actually happening in the mind and body of the 'observer' during the process of sympathising. Hume, for example, thought of sympathising as a passive process; in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) sympathy is the contagious transmission of emotion from originator to observer with little interference or evaluation of said emotions within the observer.[52] On the other hand, Smith writing on the same subject two decades later, writes clearly about a sympathetic process which is fully active, collapsing together the imagined entrance of the observer into the feelings of the sufferer (an inversion of Hume's direction of transmission), alongside an evaluative process wherein the observer judges the appropriateness of the sufferer's [imagined] emotions against their cause.[53] This is just one of the fundamental differences in sympathy as it is defined by eighteenth-century thinkers, and while Smith's definition tends to supersede Hume's in much modern scholarship, this gap usefully illustrates sympathy's multiplicity even amongst contemporaries.

As mentioned above, it would be overly simple to suggest that Smith merely developed the pre-existing theories of Hume (that were themselves inherited from even more distant sources) in a new direction, and that Smith's theories were then understood fully and embraced in the political, economic and imaginative literature of the following century. Rather, I find it

---

[52] Remy Debes, 'Adam Smith and the Sympathetic Imagination', *Adam Smith: His Life, Thought and Legacy*, ed. by Ryan Patrick Hanley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc77g77 [accessed 14 April 2020], p. 194.

[53] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by Ryan Patrick Hanley, (London: Penguin Books, 2009), pp. 13-14.

more useful to think about what remained consistent across eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century sympathetic configurations, as a means of illuminating what knowledge about the experience of sympathy was taken for granted. I want to suggest that these assumptions about common knowledge, accepted practice and communal experiences tell us more about how sympathy was broadly and publicly understood by readers of this period. This approach will also shed more light on the resistance and scepticism that doctrines of sympathy faced in British literature, particularly in the wake of the French Revolution, which broke out less than a year before the sixth edition—the last published in Smith's lifetime—of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* appeared. That these eighteenth-century sources had little provision for the transmission of violent, or 'unsocial passions',—indeed, Smith reasoned that such passions would necessarily be dampened by the sympathetic process and judgment of the spectator—demonstrates the difficulty in transposing either *Treatise of Human Nature* or *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* wholesale onto the new anxieties of Victorian Britain.[54]

What remains, then, are four core principles defining sympathy as it is understood by eighteenth-century thinkers and with significant impact upon nineteenth-century intellectual culture. Firstly, sympathy is a natural, observable phenomenon *described* by Hume and Smith, rather than a method of preserving humanistic relationships *prescribed* by them; this appears to be at odds with some of our inherited wisdom about the role of novelistic sympathy in the Condition-of-England debate, wherein sympathy often figures as a prescriptive remedy to the problem of industrial capitalism. Though, for Smith and Hume, as well as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, the question of man's natural sociability might well betray an unconscious desire to insulate human connections from the market, their treatment of sympathy is as an already extant, universal and natural phenomenon.[55] According to these moral philosophers man needn't strive to become *more* sympathetic; the existence and universality of sympathy is proof in and of itself

---

[54] Smith, p. 43.

[55] Jose R Torre, '"An Inward Spring of Motion and Action": The Teleology of Political Economy and Moral Philosophy and in Age of the Anglo-American Enlightenment', *Early American Studies*, 8.2, (2010), 646-71, p. 646.

that some self-interested actions cannot corrode the innate fellowship of man. Secondly, and mentioned above, is that 'sympathy' is best understood as a *process* by which emotions experienced in the other appear to *manifest,* to greater or lesser degree, in the observer. Thirdly, the arts are a commonly accepted vehicle of the sympathetic transfer of emotion from fiction to spectator, and this is observable independent of the rise of the novel, though the sympathetic process later becomes inextricable from the form of the novel. And finally, that sympathy and its seeming antithesis, self-love, are both integral parts of a larger system of natural social formation; thus, sympathy is an essential component of both the development of political economy and the foundation of the liberal citizenry.

In the following section I will use the work of Smith and Hume to explore these core principles in greater detail in order to more clearly define the landscape of sympathy in intellectual culture before the turn of the century. As mentioned above, much of my interest in the work of these two figures views their commonalities as evidence of a common-sense definition of sympathy current amongst not only the moral philosophers, but an educated readership. Of course, the significant disagreements about the sympathetic process between Hume and Smith also bear thinking about, and I do want to give some attention to the competing aspects of these models, as they retain significance in later depictions of working-class unrest, particularly fictions which imagine the impact of the sympathetic transmission of emotions on wider public life.

The second half of the chapter will bring this study more fully into the nineteenth century, while bearing in mind the groundwork laid by the moral philosophers. In this later section I want to suggest that the outbreak of the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century dramatically shifts understandings of sympathy's role in social formation moving into the 1800s. But even more significant than the fact of the French Revolution is its reinterpretation in British literature in the nineteenth century. In illustrating the shift from constructive, universal sympathy as it is understood by eighteenth-century moral philosophers to the palliative sympathy

mobilised by the nineteenth-century novel, the contemporary conditions surrounding the production of the novel, including historical context, intellectual milieu, and formal conventions must be considered as part of the strategic deployment of sympathy. This is because the meanings, processes, and by-products of sympathising are enabled by a combination of their historical specificity and contemporary legibility. And in many ways, the prevailing 'signified' of the nineteenth century, for those who were living and writing in it, was *modernity*. Here, I will read Thomas Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times' (1829) and *The French Revolution: A History* (1837) alongside *Chartism* (1839) and *Past and Present* (1843) to demonstrate the ways in which nineteenth-century literature combined, challenged and subverted the sympathetic models of both Smith and Hume. As a 'towering presence in Victorian moral and political thought', Carlyle's work usefully bridges the gap between the philosophical moralising of the Scottish Enlightenment, and the specific problems facing contemporary readers that are collapsed within his Condition-of-England question.[56] I will argue that Carlyle's unhealthy social bodies, in particular the starving poor of the *French Revolution* and the chimera of *Chartism,* allegorise the passage of 'unsocial' or violent passions across and through working-class bodies. While this combines some aspects of Hume's contagion theory with Smith's classification of the passions, Carlyle essentially describes a phenomenon which neither philosopher had fully accounted for in the mid-eighteenth century: that 'the mob' were also sympathetic subjects and that irrational passions were as potent as socially formative ones.

(I) Ethicists and Economists: Divergent Mechanics and the Language of Moral Progress in the Sympathetic Trajectories of David Hume and Adam Smith

The last twenty or so years have seen the language, form and function of sympathy revived as a topic of keen interest in nineteenth-century literary scholarship. Where the prevailing winds of

---

[56] Alexander Jordan, "David Hume is Pontiff of the World: Thomas Carlyle on Epicureanism, Laissez-Faire, and Public Opinion", *Journal of British Studies,* 56. 3, (2017), https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2017.62, p. 559.

criticism of the mid-twentieth century largely regarded the Victorian emphasis on sympathy as an 'individual affective solution to the problem of class alienation' with scepticism, more recent scholarship has attempted to fully unpack the operations of sympathy outside of its moralising constraints and affective limitations.[57] Doing so has often meant grounding discussions of sympathy in the Victorian era in its epistemological forbearer: Enlightenment sympathy, as it is usefully and concretely theorised by the moral philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith.

There are several good reasons that can account for this turn toward the Enlightenment in the process of untangling the problem of Victorian sympathy. Hume and Smith were both influential figures even after their deaths, and there is good reason to believe, as Greiner suggests, that their work was not only still being read by the Victorian novelists, but that this work often prompted direct responses within the Victorian novel.[58] In addition to this, Hume and Smith each wrote methodically and explicitly on sympathy as a vehicle of shared human emotion and communal moral development. The clarity of this work bears up to scrutiny, and often leaves less unsaid about the precise workings of sympathy and its aims than we frequently see in later treatments of the subject; Victorian sympathy simply tends to be less concretely defined than Enlightenment sympathy. While sympathetic identification might be the aim of nineteenth-century fiction and might also be the Victorian solution to the problem of class alienation, few writers—even such mammoth figures as Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill—provide a systematic account of *how* sympathy operates. And both Hume and Smith have long figured within Victorian studies anyway; Hume, largely as the antecedent to Benthamite Epicureanism, defender of private property and railed against by Carlyle; and Smith alongside Malthus and Ricardo for his later writing that naturalised a series of 'laws' governing economic man. As a result, Hume and Smith have become the accepted standard and field-

---

[57] Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 15.
[58] Rae Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 11.

defining theorists of the sympathetic emotions, and their individual work on the mechanics of emotional transference is often invoked as *the* primordial textual analyses of eighteenth *and* nineteenth-century communal emotion.

Until relatively recently, Humean sympathy and the logic of unconscious emotion had 'dominate[d] in the criticism of the English realist novel'.[59] Greiner argues that this emphasis on Hume's contagious emotions illustrates a trend in affect studies that 'favour[s] theories privileging unthinking embodiment: at the beginning of the century, those emphasising the physiological responses (tears, horror) associated with sentimental and Gothic fiction; and at the end, those emerging from scientific discourses concerned with the instincts and drives.'[60] However, over the last two decades, Adam Smith's early work on sympathy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* has received increased attention—indeed, is having a moment—within Victorian literary scholarship. Because Smith's imaginative sympathy is fundamentally at odds with the potency of Hume's contagious emotions, readings of Smith's *Moral Sentiments* have been mobilised to address a wider range of Victorian fiction. But Greiner's assessment belies a sort of privileging going on within this shift; while Humean emotions may be relevant to the study of mere genre fiction and might explain away some of the Victorian concerns about the operation of fiction upon the mind of the reader, Smith's deployment of the rational imagination has rightly been embraced by scholarship to account for everything from the fruitlessness of Victorian morality and the foundations of class as representative identity, to the rise of the form of the novel and the dominance of realism in the industrial age.[61] And this privileging of broadly realist fiction in the novels of authors that have always featured prominently in the Romantic and Victorian landscapes, like Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Henry James, is only part of the problem. On the one hand, such work reasserts the cordoning-off of certain novelists—indeed, certain *kinds* of novels—as broadly 'intellectual', while reducing,

---

[59] *Ibid.* p. 5.
[60] *Ibid.* p. 5.
[61] See: Jaffe, Britton, and Greiner.

and even ignoring, the significance of novels that deal explicitly with 'feelings' that feminist criticism has long worked against. On the other hand, to do so makes appear monolithic that which can only be multiple. By reading the literature of the nineteenth century exclusively through the lens of Hume and/ or Smith, criticism in this vein tends to obscure the specificity of historical, political, and social circumstances that made certain kinds of feelings not just intelligible, but possible. In other words, this approach minimises the pyscho-social configurations that, as Reddy demonstrates, invest feelings with meaning.[62] The legacy of Smith and Hume, even when construed as an unlooked for, but convenient convergence with literary form, necessarily obscures what the novel and novelists have to say about themselves and the community of readers they exist within.

(i) Sympathy and (Political)(Economy): Self-Interest, Justice and Citizenship

One of the most significant and frequently overlooked aspects of sympathy as it is understood by both Hume and Smith is that it is both naturally occurring and easily observable in society.[63] This is important to acknowledge because, although revisionist scholarship has suggested sympathy as a topic of interest flourished in the wake of the Industrial Revolution as a way for thinkers to reassert the prominence of humanistic relationships over the ascendant cash-nexus created by the industrial marketplace, these thinkers don't necessarily portray sympathy (or humanism in general) as an alternative to such economic systems in their own work.[64] While it is certainly convincing that the expansion of philosophical interest in sympathy likely points to growing conscious or unconscious anxieties about the alienating and dehumanising potential of early political economy, this can be difficult to reconcile with proto-capitalist interpretations that scholarship interested in Hume, Smith and other Scottish Enlightenment figures emphasises.

---

[62] William M Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 17.
[63] Smith, p. 28.
[64] Hanley, p. 174.

This difficulty largely stems from enduring, yet popular over-simplifications of Smith's best-known work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), which have been challenged with increasing scrutiny in scholarship over the past decade, and which has only just begun filtering into the broader public discourse about Smith's role as the father of modern capitalism.[65] To remedy this, recent scholarship, particularly the 'new view' of Adam Smith, has increasingly emphasised the significance of the humanist approach in Smith's earlier work in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and has identified internal consistencies between this and his later work on economic systems that draws heavily on 'the framework of thought already developed in the *Moral Sentiments*'.[66] The most significant aspect of this kind of work is that it emphasises the significance of Smith's humanist philosophy which not only predated, but largely informed, his work in *The Wealth of Nations*. Further, by asserting the significance of *Moral Sentiments,* revisionist studies of Smith's work have pointed out that, among other ethical concerns missed out from a superficial reading of *The Wealth of Nations*, are 'the connections between ethics and economics, and the co-dependent—rather than free-standing—role of institutions in general and free markets in particular in the functioning of the economy' in Smith's thought.[67]

In contextualising Smith's arguments about the function of institutions with readings of the Christian religiosity that undergirds his ethical pronouncements, alongside the Classical humanist and Stoic legacy of his mode of inquiry, 'new view' scholarship has challenged popular conclusions about Smith's meaning as well as historical understandings of *The Wealth of Nations* as the foundational document of modern capitalism.[68] I want to suggest that this rehabilitation of Smith's image has contributed significantly to his adoption by literary scholars, and that *Moral Sentiments* in particular has proved fertile ground for the continuance of this project. However, it

---

[65] For an example, see: Mark Carney, 'From Moral to Market Sentiments', Reith Lectures, BBC Radio 4, 2 December 2020.

[66] Paul Oslington, 'The 'New View' of Adam Smith in Context', *History of Economics Review*, 71:1, (2018) 118-131, DOI: 10.1080/10370196.2018.1580114

[67] Amartya Sen, 'Introduction' to *The Wealth of Nations*, *Books I-III*, by Adam Smith, (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. viii.

[68] Oslington, pp. 120-1.

is imperative that these studies, by homing in on Smith's sympathetic pronouncements, not divorce his study of moral sentiments from his descriptions of economic functionality. Indeed, to do so would go some way to reasserting the 'Adam Smith problem', by suggesting that his ethical arguments are either incompatible with, or fundamentally distinct from, his descriptions of political economy. As Audrey Jaffe demonstrates in her book *Scenes of Sympathy*, economic stratification is baked-in to Smith's sympathetic philosophy.[69] This is not to suggest that the new direction of Smith studies is wrong or misguided in 'rescuing' him from reductive configurations of, say, self-interest in his work, but that holistic attention to Smith's work need not deny the classist constraints of his moralising to successfully challenge problematic readings of Smith's concept of self-love. The aim of the new direction of Smith studies in rescuing his writings from the discipline of economics and rehabilitating his reputation as a proponent of unchecked self-interest must likewise challenge the practicality and prejudices of his sympathetic system. I want to suggest that we should read Smith's observations about the mechanics of sympathy in *Moral Sentiments* the same way that we read his economic analysis in *The Wealth of Nations*, by acknowledging that Smith is writing from of position of relative non-expertise, and working backwards to explain the shifts in British society he bore witness to.

Scholarship outside of the field of economics has long emphasised that Smith was not an economist by training, but an historian and philosopher, and that any sustained analysis of *The Wealth of Nations* must bear this in mind.[70] As Paul Oslington points out, it is actually David Ricardo's *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817) that empiricizes some aspects of Smith's theories (and challenges others).[71] Indeed, other contemporary thinkers, like Thomas Malthus, John Stuart Mill and Samuel Smiles overwhelmingly considered Ricardo the figure that

---

[69] Jaffe, p. 16.
[70] Jerry Evensky, "Chapter V: *The Wealth of Nations*", in *Adam Smith: His Life, Thought and Legacy*, ed. by Ryan Patrick Hanley, (Princeton: PUP, 2016), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc77g77, p. 67.
[71] Oslington, p. 121.

transformed the study of economics into a distinct and scientific discipline, not Smith.[72] But

what *The Wealth of Nations* did do was define and defend the prevailing economic system at work

in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by defining economic progress as both teleological

toward political economy and toward a more 'civilised' (read: bourgeois, British) society. Indeed,

in the opening to the first book, Smith's historicization of civil progress foregrounds this work as

the overarching project of the book. Moreover, as Evensky points out, within Smith's principles

of economic progress is 'an oft-neglected thread […] that such progress is impossible without

the simultaneous, appropriate development of social and political institutions'.[73] It is the

development of such institutions, enabled by man's sympathetic attachments, that is the primary

focus of the *Moral Sentiments*.

Sympathetic attachments between otherwise disinterested parties were pointed to by

thinkers like Smith, Hume and Hutcheson as evidence of man's inherently social nature and

comprise but one facet of their efforts to account for the global, progressive development of

societies. However, it is important to point out that neither Hume nor Smith theorises sympathy

as antithetical to political economy. In fact, both take pains to demonstrate the centrality of both

sympathy and the civilising arc of economic evolution to the advancement and supremacy of

British society. Furthermore, repeated modern challenges to misrepresentations of the doctrine

of laissez-faire have emphasised the 'political' component of political economy. Smith, for

example, did not consider economics as an independent field or science, but as virtually

indistinguishable from political thought, and was less clear on legislative non-interference than he

was on the commercial benefits of the proper administration of justice.[74] Hume, too, wrote

explicitly about 'justice' as essential to social stability, writing, 'without justice, society must

---

[72] See: Smiles, p. 296, and John Stuart Mill, 'Of the Laws of Exchange Between Nations; and the Distribution of the Gains of Commerce Among the Countries of the Commercial World', in *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy,* (London: John W Parker, 1844), p. 1.

[73] Evensky p. 67.

[74] Emma Rothschild and Amartya Sen, 'Adam Smith's Economics' in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 319-65, p. 326.

immediately dissolve, and everyone must fall into that savage and solitary condition which is infinitely worse than the worse [sic.] situation that can possibly be supposed in society'.[75] Moreover, as demonstrated by Carl Wennerlind, Hume argued not only 'that justice […] promotes some of the most essential social virtues, such as fairness, sociability, civility, ingenuity and humanity,' but that it was also 'the kernel of economic affluence'.[76]

Where Smith would later suggest 'improvement[s] in the circumstances of the lower ranks of people' as both just and necessary corollaries to continued economic success, Hume's earlier work intimately connected the development and deployment of justice with the protection of private property.[77] Indeed, when in *Chartism* (1839) Thomas Carlyle condemns the notion that 'Society exists for the protection of private property,' it is an explicit critique of this aspect of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*.[78] This critique of Hume was by no means by an exceptional move for Carlyle, as he often positioned himself in opposition to Hume and the Epicurean tradition in moral philosophy, but it does misrepresent the full import of Hume's argument.[79] Rather than construing private property, the income generated through land ownership, or the value of individual possessions as the sole impetus to the establishment of society, Hume argues that sympathy specifically, and virtue more broadly, are the civilising ends of such institutions, writing, 'self-interest is the original motive to the establishment of justice*: but a sympathy with public interest* is the source of the moral approbation which attends that virtue'[emphasis added].[80]

(ii) Sympathy as Process: Emotions, Imagination and the Physical Symptoms of Fellow-Feeling

As critical texts that consider literary, and specifically novelistic, sympathy have become more popular over the last two decades, it perhaps goes without saying that sympathy as process

---

[75] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L.A. Selby-Bigge, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/342 [accessed 24 Sept 2020], p. 336.
[76] Carl Wennerlind, 'The Role of Political Economy in Hume's Moral Philosophy', *Hume Studies*, 37.1, (2011), 43-64, pp. 44-48.
[77] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, *Books I-III*, ed. by Amartya Sen, (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 181.
[78] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 36.
[79] Jordan, p. 557.
[80] Hume, *Human Nature*, p. 337.

is distinct from sympathy as pity. However, the word 'sympathy' was, and continues to be, a useful place-holder to describe various *kinds* of feelings and therefore, continues to confuse detailed analyses of its historical expression. In the introduction to her book on the subject, Rae Greiner acknowledges the difficulty of attempting to write about sympathy without writing directly about emotions; while the remainder of the book proves that this can, indeed, be done, it is somewhat dismissive of the fact that sympathy, while *not* an emotion itself, is often misinterpreted as one.[81] So while the specific emotions derived from the sympathetic process are not the main focus of my study, in the following chapters I do want to spend some time thinking about which specific emotions were understood to pass more easily—or, intriguingly, not at all—from fiction to reader through narrative sympathy, as well as which emotions tend to be most confused with sympathy in nineteenth-century literature. But, for the purposes of this chapter I, like Greiner, find it necessary to first liberate sympathy from the 'harder to define' emotions.[82] Sympathy is *like* them, and often facilitates their experience, but it is not one of them.

Even during the 'age of sympathy', Adam Smith needed to be clear about what precisely he was writing when it came to sympathy.[83] Within the first few pages of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith tells us, 'pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatsoever'.[84] Already, Smith has identified and attempted to pre-empt the confusing ways in which the word 'sympathy' is conflated with compassion and pity, which themselves are separated from the original experience of 'sorrow'. He suggests that true sympathy has the potential to transmit a broader range of 'passions' than either 'compassion' or

---

[81] Greiner, p. 1.
[82] *Ibid.* p. 1.
[83] Hanley, 'The Eighteenth-Century Context…', p. 171.
[84] Smith, p. 15.

'pity' encompasses. It is important to note, though, that for Smith, compassion and pity are not passions either.[85] Both are limited versions of the sympathetic process at work; they are words describing the sympathetic experience—whatever that might look like,— of *another's* sorrow, not the feeling of sorrow itself.

Smith attempts to bypass this misunderstanding of sympathy and compassion early on by (re)introducing a broader, yet more precise synonym for sympathy: 'fellow-feeling'. Given the pre-eminence of the neo-classical in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, it is not surprising that the literal translation of the Greek from which 'sympathy' is derived returned to common usage. What makes Smith's invocation of the Greek translation interesting is his historiographical inversion of meaning. He substitutes 'fellow-feeling' for 'sympathy' to indicate his *modern* definition of the term, contrasted against the presumed older and more limited equivalence between sympathy and compassion. For Smith and his contemporaries, modern sympathy is both less specific than compassion because fellow-feeling can communicate a variety of emotions, and it is more specific than compassion because it works in precise, calculable ways that structure civil society. In the following paragraphs, I will summarise the aims of sympathy as they are understood by the moral philosophers, with particular emphasis on *how* emotional transference is achieved, *why* that transference is integral to the functioning of a healthy society and *what* limits there are on the sympathetic transfer of emotions as they are presented in the work of David Hume and Adam Smith. In doing so, I hope to illustrate not only a relationship between sympathy and social health that confusingly meets with both scepticism and acceptance—often within the same work—in the Condition-of-England debate of the following century, but also to demonstrate how corrupted species of Smithian and Humean sympathy are used to *produce* knowledge about the working class.

---

[85] Hume, *Human Nature*, p. 252.

However, it is in describing the exact nature of the internal sympathetic process that the Smithian version of sympathy consciously diverges from that of Hume. The key distinction between Humean and Smithian sympathies can be summed up in competing concepts of transmission. In describing this system Hume first distinguishes between 'impressions' and 'ideas'; the first corresponding to 'feeling' and the second to 'thinking'. He writes, 'I believe it will not be very necessary to employ many words in explaining this distinction. Every one of himself will readily perceive the difference betwixt feeling and thinking.'[86] This, of course, has become a frustratingly knotty distinction for scholars of the affects, as cognitive and sociological studies have complicated rather than uncovered the origins of human emotions. In fact, modern scholarship is tending toward *fewer* distinctions between thinking and feeling, or more precisely, that feeling is perhaps best understood as a particular kind of thinking.[87] However, paradoxically to his confidence that readers will easily distinguish between the two, Hume appears to anticipate this difficulty, writing:

'Tis indeed evident that when we sympathize with the passions and sentiments of others, these movements appear at first in our mind as mere ideas, and are conceived *to belong to another person*, as we conceive of any other matter of fact. 'Tis also evident that the ideas of the affections of others are converted into *the very impressions they represent, and that the passions arise in conformity to the images we form of them* [emphasis added].[88]

Here, Hume speaks to the confusion between our ideas and impressions, which he uses to explain how one is so readily transformed into the other. Though the observer first becomes conscious of the passions of the other as ideas—chiefly, by recognising legible displays of emotion in another person—this recognition metamorphoses in the mind of the observer into feelings that correspond completely to the feelings observed. Hume clarifies this position later on in the *Treatise of Human Nature* writing, the emotions are 'so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another and produce correspondent movements in all

---

[86] Hume, *Human Nature,* p. 2.
[87] Reddy, p. 16.
[88] Hume, *Human Nature*, p. 220.

human breasts.'[89] This single sentence constitutes Hume's clearest and most long-lived

articulation of the sympathetic process. The critical issue for Hume is that the passions, or

emotions, are contagious; this is to say that they pass between subjects without the conscious

intervention of either the sufferer of the original passion, or the observer of that passion.

Moreover, the metaphor of contagion indicates that sympathy reproduces the same original

passion in the breast of the observer—though he does go on to mitigate this point by suggesting

that the passions might be reproduced in a less forceful degree.[90] For Hume, sympathy does not

transform, or substitute one emotion for another during the process of transference. Instead,

sympathy literally infects the observer with the sufferer's emotions through the transfer of ideas.

The major development offered in the first chapter of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is

that sympathy does not describe the *transmittance* of emotion at all. For Smith, while sympathy

does *produce* emotions within the spectator, these emotions need not have any resemblance to the

original passions of the sufferer. The passions of both subjects exist independently of one

another and are linked only in the spectator's imagination. Smith writes:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner
in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.
Though our brother be on the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never
inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and
it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations.[91]

This is a critical inversion of Hume's model of the direction of the flow of sympathy, in which

the sufferer's emotions manifest as 'correspondent movements in the breast' of the observer.[92]

Smith contends that the passions, rather than being so contagious as to infect the observer with

their likeness, are entirely obscured from the spectator. For Smith then, the original passions of

the sufferer are generated in response to specific circumstances, while the sympathetic passions

---

[89] Hume, *Human Nature*, p. 605.
[90] *Ibid.* p. 592.
[91] Smith, p. 13.
[92] Hume, *Human Nature*, p. 605.

of the spectator are likewise generated by the imaginative entrance into those circumstances. The spectator has no actual knowledge of what the sufferer feels, therefore Smith's emotions are far less potent than Hume's. For Hume, the emotions radiate outward from their original source, and take root in the observer. For Smith, the spectator 'enter[s] into' the *circumstances* of the sufferer and imagines what they themselves might feel; therefore, in Smith's sympathetic model the spectator is always thinking first and foremost about *themself*.[93]

It should be noted, however, that it is Smith, not Hume, that codifies the terms 'sufferer' and 'spectator' to describe the two parties of interest in the sympathetic process. I find the clarity afforded by these terms to be invaluable when it comes to defining sympathy and the passage of emotion from the former to the latter—though the reader will note that when writing about Hume's theories I have further substituted 'spectator' for 'observer' to acknowledge the philosophical specificity of Smith's impartial spectator. In unpacking the import of Hume's contagion-theory of emotion, 'sufferer' is useful because it underscores the disease-like qualities of the passions and their transmission, which more readily conveys the dangerous potential of the instant and unconscious dissemination of emotions. Indeed, I want to suggest that the figure of the sufferer can be used to forecast nineteenth-century anxieties around the Humean sympathetic trajectory, by stressing both the origins of dangerous passions and the results of their inevitable, and egalitarian spread. And to be sure, Hume's contagious emotions allows for greater parity between the two parties involved in the sympathetic process. His system privileges neither individual because the observer is just as susceptible to the passions as the original sufferer, which pass from one to the other unimpeded by the observer's consciousness. Following Hume's model, the source of original passions acts as an implicit threat to the equilibrium of the viewer, with the potential to cause suffering in them as well.

---

[93] Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, p. 15.

This is in spite of the fact that Hume had a clear audience in mind when he wrote *Treatise of Human Nature*, and that in describing the mechanical actions of sympathy Hume was describing its expression within enlightened, bourgeois communities. As Mary Fairclough points out, 'Hume asserts that this phenomenon is universal, repeated across the globe and throughout history, but in each case, sympathy is assumed to operate only in polite society or in small circles within it'.[94] Nevertheless, Hume's contagion metaphor retains its relevance throughout the Romantic period and into Victoria's reign because it is readily adapted to explain the violence of Europe's revolutionary decades. Though Hume certainly did not intend for his sympathetic model to extend to, and perhaps even justify, the activities of 'the mob', by the 1830s the 'great facility' with which emotions spread and are reproduced within groups becomes a key component of mid-century depictions of working-class civil unrest. Indeed, Fairclough posits Hume's 'indulgence' with regard to emotional contagion pre-French Revolution as an explicit counter-point to Thomas De Quincey's hostility toward the same phenomenon by the 1830s and 40s.[95] Though Hume's work is implicitly exclusive, 'written for a genteel readership of individuals known to the author,' the contagion metaphor is so virulent that it infects the language with which the proletariat are configured, from Carlyle's recreation of the eighteenth-century mob in his *French Revolution*, to Gaskell's depiction of the contemporary crowd in *North and South*.[96] But Hume himself tends to use the sufferer configuration in much more limited ways: he (and later, Smith) uses the sufferer to describe a figure afflicted by extreme, negative emotions, like violent anger, and to describe the impassioned suffering of marginalised, poor, and non-British groups.[97] And while Hume does occasionally refer to the spectator, he tends to do so in the sense of a subjective viewer of events; in Hume's writings, the spectator is limitedly

---

[94] Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic crowd; Sympathy, controversy and print culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). p. 2.
[95] *Ibid.* p. 2.
[96] *Ibid.* p. 2.
[97] Hume, *Human Nature*, p. 400.

configured as the eye-witness or the audience, passively viewing events through a generally sympathetic lens.

Smith, on the other hand, introduces the sufferer with his famous 'brother […] on the rack' example, but returns to this concept to distinguish between actual, embodied experiences and imagined ones. In conceiving of an *oppositional* relationship between sufferer and observer, Smith places the former in a position of precarity relative to the latter. The sufferer is not only at the mercy of circumstance, but also at the mercy of the passions given rise to by those circumstances, whereas the spectator is removed from both. This clear negative power dynamic, in which the relative comfort and safety of the spectator inoculates them from experiencing 'perfect sympathy' with the sufferer, is a key component of Smith's reconfiguration of the sympathetic process. In fact, while the object of suffering is a useful tool for Smith to anecdotally describe the sympathetic process, it is not insignificant that Smith later argues that suffering of too great a pitch actually diminishes the spectator's ability to feel along with the sufferer.[98]

According to Smith, the experience of sympathetic emotions is evidence of the spectator's judgement that the observed passions of the sufferer are appropriate in both nature and pitch to their circumstances. Though Smith does acknowledge partial, or 'conditional' sympathies, he also argues that the sufferer often 'desires a more complete sympathy,' and must adjust the pitch of his feelings to match what the spectator can freely go along with.[99] In a further departure from Hume's contagious emotions, it is the *sufferer* who must interpret and mirror the sympathetic capacity of the *spectator* by 'placing himself in their [situation], and thence conceiving some degree of that coolness about his own fortune with which he is sensible they will view it.'[100] This sympathy is a closed loop, hemmed in from both sides by propriety and the

---

[98] Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, p. 57.
[99] *Ibid.* p. 28.
[100] *Ibid.* p. 29.

consciousness of being both an object of study as well as an affective subject. Moreover, the passions here are impotent, and subservient to both reason and decorum.

For Smith, sympathetic identification operates on a sliding scale which privileges reasoned, rational and decorous expressions of suffering, over those bodily sensations and base, protean passions which beget only weak sympathetic bonds. Smith argues that we do not truly sympathise with bodily sensations like hunger, thirst or physical pain because they are limited to suffering within the body, have little intellectual dimension, and are easily satisfied and disregarded, even by the sufferer.[101] He argues,

We can sympathize with the distress which excessive hunger occasions when we read the description of it in the journal of a siege, or of a sea-voyage. We imagine ourselves in the situation of the sufferers, and thence readily conceive the grief, the fear, and consternation, which must necessarily distract them. We feel, ourselves, some degree of those passions, and therefore sympathize with them: but we do not grow hungry by reading the description, we cannot properly, even in this case, be said to sympathize with their hunger.[102]

Thus, true, constructive, sympathy is displaced away from the original experience of either bodily passions (like hunger), or imaginative passions that the spectator cannot fully enter-into (like love) and onto their—imagined, yes, but also—rational, predictable products. In this example, the reader can only sympathise with the secondary passions hunger is likely to excite, but critically these secondary passions are given rise to by circumstances that the reader is insulated from.

This example illustrates another aspect of Smith's understanding of the sympathetic process that has been much commented on in literary criticism: the essential fictiveness of sympathetic experiences. Because it is predicated on the imagination alone and performed by spectators 'at our ease', the sympathetic spectator need not *feel* anything whatsoever.[103] And if the spectator does feel something, it is only a diminished version of whatever they think the sufferer

---

[101] *Ibid.* p. 36.
[102] *Ibid.* p. 35.
[103] *Ibid.* p. 13.

ought to feel, and only so long as those feelings are separated from bodily experience. Moreover, Smith and Hume both recognised the role of art objects in cultivating sympathetic experiences and saw 'sentimental cultural productions such as the theatre, novels and short stories' as necessary to the continued production of sympathy.[104] In Smith's work 'authors and audiences derive pleasure' from art works 'designed to elicit deep and sad emotions' which 'unwittingly manufacture[d] the sympathetic bonds central to society.'[105] This usefully centralises the audience's, or from the example above, the reader's affective experience that is prompted by the text, but not necessarily pre-formed in the text. Add to that the recognition that entering into fictitious circumstances necessarily produces fictitious feelings (to use Smiles' phrase from *Self-Help*), or a transformation of ideas into emotions that takes place only in the mind of the reader and is wholly divorced from actual experience.

Smith, like Hume, is writing for an audience of peers—male, middle-class and well educated—but implies that the operations of sympathy, if not the sympathetic sentiments themselves, are essentially the same across other groups. I have argued above that Smith privileges passions with a rational, broadly intellectual dimension, at the expense of passions which originate in the body, or in satiable desire. But this method of ranking the sympathetic-ness of passions is critically tied to class distinctions, such that Smith imagines that the passions of the bourgeoise are more inviting, while the passions of 'the mob' necessarily produce only partial sympathies. To make this point Smith compares spectator responses to a man being physically struck and the mob witnessing a hanging. There are conspicuous differences in the language Smith uses to describe these two events. In describing the experience of the bourgeois spectator he writes, 'when *we* see a stroke aimed and ready to fall upon the arm or leg of another person, *we* naturally shrink and draw back our own leg' [emphasis added].[106] But in the following sentence, he writes 'the mob, when *they* are gazing at a dancer on the slack rope, naturally writhe

---

[104] Torre, p. 660.
[105] *Ibid.* p. 660.
[106] Smith, *Moral Sentiments,* p. 14.

and twist and balance their own bodies as they see him do, and as *they* themselves feel they must do if in his situation' [emphasis added].[107] Smith's rhetorical separation of himself and his readership as a 'we' set apart from the 'they' of the mob is telling, but even more so is his choice of representative example. The stroke aimed and instinctive drawing back could be a universal example of sympathy, but the 'dancer on the slack rope' is emphatically not. This example is not intentionally insulting as such, because Smith is not writing *for* the mob, but *about* them, and therefore relies on common-knowledge depictions of the consciousness of the crowd to render their actions comprehensible to his readers. Crucially, however, in the *Moral Sentiments*—written decades before the Reign of Terror—only the figure of the mob is susceptible to the physical effects of entering into the circumstances of the executed. It is therefore conceivable, if the success of Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) is any indication, that the aftermath of the French Revolution developed new sympathetic configurations within the bourgeois reading public, who might then twist bodily away from the figure on the gallows or at the guillotine and enter into the distress such circumstances might occasion.

(iii) The Incubation of Virtue: Sympathy and Civilisation, and its Implications for Literary Studies

While it is important to note the different forms of Smithian and Humean sympathy, as both systems maintain influence and continue to be reproduced well into the nineteenth century, this should not detract from what these moral philosophers do agree on: the civilising function of sympathy. During the Enlightenment, sympathy was understood as a broadly generative process that bound society through the approbation of so-called moral sentiments, or virtues. In arguing that sympathy's natural by-product is social cohesion, Smith posits the significance of the evaluative dimension of the spectator's sympathetic emotions. This is to say that the fundamental object of Smith's sympathy is not merely affective bonds, but the same teleological

---

[107] Smith, *Moral Sentiments,* p. 14.

civil development he later theorises in *Wealth of Nations*.[108] The passions most conducive to

sympathy are Smith's 'social passions,' in which he includes, 'generosity, humanity, kindness,

compassion, mutual friendship, and esteem,' often summed up by the catch-all: 'benevolence'.[109]

Here, Smith is echoing Hume's argument in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)—

published just eight years before the *Moral Sentiments*. Of the moral sentiments, Hume writes,

No qualities are more entitled to the general good-will or approbation of mankind, than
beneficence and humanity, friendship and gratitude, natural affection and public spirit, *or whatever
proceeds from a tender sympathy with others*, and a generous concern for our species' [emphasis added].[110]

Significantly, the social passions—benevolence, generosity, friendship, public spirit, etc.—are

doubly social. Firstly, they are universal sentiments predicated by feelings of regard for *another*

party, and secondly, they inspire the regard and approval of others. Indeed, Hume insists that

benevolence, which can only be properly arrived at through the sympathetic consideration of

others, is key to both the satisfaction of 'public interest' and individual desire.[111]

If we take seriously Hanley's persuasive suggestion that the eighteenth-century

preoccupation with sympathy is best understood as a reaction to the sudden increased

significance of non-humanist, economic relationships, sympathy must then facilitate modes of

social construction that reward meritorious behaviours with something other than capital.[112] For

Smith, that reward comes in the form of the double pleasure derived both from acts of

sympathising, and from being sympathised with.[113] He reasons that this pleasure perpetuates the

expression of the emotions that are most readily sympathised with, ensuring their greater

prevalence, and thus fashioning a more sympathetic society. And if, for both thinkers,

sympathy's ultimate purpose is to engender social cohesion by rewarding moral actors with

---

[108] Sen, 'Introduction', p. 28.
[109] Smith, p. 48.
[110] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,* (London: A. Millar, 1751) p. 25.
[111] Hume, *Human Nature*, p. 335.
[112] Hanley, 'The Eighteenth-Century Context…', p. 174.
[113] Smith, p. 18.

pleasure, the apparatus by which this takes place is public approbation. Indeed, Smith is emphatic about the relationship between sympathy and visible, communal approbation in his chapter on the 'the love of Praise […] and the dread of Blame'.[114] He argues that 'to approve of the passions of another […] is the same thing as to observe that we entirely sympathize with them,' or 'to approve of another man's opinions is to adopt those opinions, and to adopt them is to approve of them.'[115] Thus, it is not merely individual sympathising, or 'feeling along with' the emotions of another, that generates the widespread cultivation of moral sentiments that Hume and Smith observe, but the very machinery of public life, and a natural desire for praise—for being *seen* being good—that cultivates civilised societies.

For Smith, then, the social passions 'redouble' sympathy because the spectator's 'sympathy with the person who feels those passions, exactly coincides with his concern for the person who is the object of them.'[116] Interestingly, in this case Smith has distanced the spectator even further from the original passions experienced by the object of sympathetic emotions. In 'entering into' the social passions, the spectator does not sympathise explicitly with the misery or need that might occasion, say, generosity. Rather this spectator experiences 'complete sympathy' with *another spectator*, imagining (1) that the concern they feel for the miserable object is in proportion to the sufferer's real circumstances, (2) that the 'becoming' generosity of another party is merited by and equals that degree of concern, *and* (3) that were they in a position to act on behalf of the miserable object, they should behave in complete accordance with the generous spectator.[117] Bearing in mind the power imbalance between sympathiser and sympathetic object that approbation engenders in Smith's sympathetic process, it is worth emphasising here that the displacement of sympathy away from the original sympathetic object and onto another spectator virtually ensures that sympathising eclipses doing; entering into the feelings of the generous

---

[114] *Ibid.* p. 136.
[115] *Ibid.* p. 22.
[116] *Ibid.* p. 48.
[117] *Ibid.* p. 48.

spectator generates the same, and potentially greater, satisfaction than acting generously does while dispensing with the need of performing actual generosity. Indeed, Smith argues that the pleasant feelings given rise to by the social passions contribute more to the healthy functioning of society than the material good that could be produced through acts of generosity, writing, 'these affections […] are felt not only by the tender and the delicate, but by the rudest vulgar of mankind, to be of *more importance* to happiness than all the little services which could be expected to flow from them' [emphasis added].[118]

I want to note here how this aspect of Smithian sympathetic identification invites a particular conservative reading of some of the later Condition-of-England novels and suggest that this is the root cause of some of the scepticism directed at their apparently interventionist aspirations within twentieth-century literary criticism. Betensky and others have made much of fictions wherein working-class operatives must express themselves in accordance with broadly bourgeois virtues in order to be available to the sympathies of middle-class readers. Such readings would suggest that the industrial novel is an interpretive framework entirely conceived of, and enacted by middle-class novelists, such that they imagine a particular kind of sympathetic working class which need not have any correspondence with the real circumstances, or desires of actual working-class persons. Furthermore, because Smith insists that sympathy does not require any genuine experience, or even the opportunity for experience, of the sufferer's situation, reading about an other conceived of in the image of the self is sufficient to produce the double-boon of perfect sympathy with their imagined emotions, alongside the attendant pleasure that sympathising perfectly engenders in the self.[119] When the other, real or fictional, does not adjust their emotional pitch in accordance with spectator values—like the ill-fated Boucher in *North and South*, or the heretical Bishop Hatton in *Sybil*,—they make themselves unavailable as sympathetic objects. However, working-class cynicism of the aims of sympathy—again, both real and

---

[118] *Ibid.* p. 49
[119] Smith, *Moral Sentiments,* p. 21.

fictional—renders this non-compliance with bourgeois propriety moot, because, as is often very clearly expressed in the press, in the Six Points and in the novel, working-class operatives do not desire complete sympathy as much as they desire tangible relief from circumstances which give rise to suffering.[120]

Still, Smith's model of imaginatively 'entering into' the circumstances of the other and 'feeling' the emotions those circumstances give rise to, squares nicely with the apparent aims of narrative fiction and accounts, at least in part, for the appeal of Smith's *Moral Sentiments* in modern literary scholarship. Indeed, Britton and others have pointed out how the narrative-like qualities Smith attributes to the sympathetic process appear to anticipate the rise of the novel by accounting for the imaginative adoption of consciousness that the genre requires of both author and reader.[121] Greiner, for example, argues that the metonymic structure of the novel is uniquely positioned to engender sympathetic identification through the abstraction of feeling 'into the domain of representation'. [122] For her, sympathy is not only thematised by realism, but built into its very structure. [123] This and similar readings that privilege the formal qualities of Smith's sympathetic theory over Hume's 'correspondent movements' have had the knock-on effect of shifting nineteenth-century scholarship away from Hume's unconscious emotions which seemingly require an untenable credulity in both the disinterestedness of aesthetic representation and the compelling operation of fiction on the impotent imagination of the reader.[124] By routing sympathy through cognition (to borrow Greiner's phrase) Smith appears to have pre-empted twentieth-century Marxist critics who treat apparently mimetic representations of the working class routed through the lens of the middle-class novelist with well-founded scepticism.[125] Smith's model of sympathy apparently offers readers a way to engage with the affective aims of

---

[120] For more on working-class scepticism re: the aims and effectiveness of sympathy see the discussion of Warner, the handloom weaver from *Sybil* in Chapter II, and anti-Chartist responses to *Michael Armstrong* in Chapter III.
[121] Jeanne M. Britton, *Vicarious Narratives: A Literary History of Sympathy, 1750-1850*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 2.
[122] Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism,* p. 11.
[123] Greiner, 'Thinking…' p. 418
[124] Greiner, *Sympathetic Realism,* p. 5.
[125] *Ibid.* p. 4.

the novel, while acknowledging what can only be mimetic defects. Adherence to Smith's model accounts for any failures of the novel to either faithfully represent the passions, or to effectively transmit specific feelings onto the reader because such reproductions are always already beyond the scope of sympathetic engagement.

This is certainly useful work, but I think it diminishes the influence Hume's writings maintained into the nineteenth century, alongside the contemporary currency of his contagion-model. Especially in the wake of the French Revolution where, as Fairclough argues, depictions of the unchecked spread of emotion through the masses gave the sympathetic passions new and dangerous connotations, Hume's contagion-theory appeared to be more consistent with lived experience than Smith's cognition-theory. [126] Indeed, in *Moral Sentiments* Smith's significant privileging of the spectator in the sympathetic process leaves little space for the wild-fire spread of 'unsocial passions'—'hatred and resentment, with all their different modifications'—that would come to dominate nineteenth-century recastings of the French Revolution with the British proletariat.[127] Not only does the spectator's imaginative adoption of the sufferer's circumstance generate emotions independently of sufferer passions, but—if we adhere to the Smithian version of sympathetic engagement—the very presence of an impartial spectator effectively polices the visibility of sufferer emotions and renders them intelligible only insofar as they invite spectator participation. Thus, Smithian cognitive-sympathy consciously emphasises normative homogeny through spectatorship, while Humean contagious-sympathy, however inadvertently, allows for a greater variety of passions to be transmitted to a greater variety of subjects.

I want to suggest that while both Humean and Smithian sympathetic models were still being deployed well into the nineteenth century, they were not seen as incompatible, or even in competition with one another, because they were understood to usefully articulate the origins of markedly different phenomena. Thus, in readings of the realist novel Smith should not *replace*

---

[126] Fairclough, p. 12.
[127] Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, p. 42.

Hume as the primary methodology for interpreting, or generating, sympathetic emotions, just as Hume's passive, yet potent emotions cannot alone account for Victorian anxieties about the action of fiction on the mind of the reader. But, it is clear that Hume's contagion-model of sympathy was still being frequently employed to explain the unchecked spread of particularly negative emotions through working-class communities, and that these emotions were frequently characterised as unreasoned, selfish, short-sighted and/or unintelligible by their bourgeois interpreters. This contrasts against the Smithian-seeming deliberate, conscientious *translation* of working-class miseries via the written word into the sympathetic *secondary* passions that were the purview of the morally-upright, interventionist bourgeoisie. Moreover, though the spread of unsocial passions through working-class communities was often configured as dangerous to the stability of the state and to the safety of persons and private property, in the post-Revolutionary period it is worth noting that unsocial passions were rarely portrayed as contagious to the upper-classes.[128] This is because by the mid-century a trend in affective composition had emerged that tended to locate the origins of middle-class passions within the reason, while working-class passions continued to originate from the body. Thus, the supposed immunity of middle-class protagonists, narrators, and readers to unsocial working-class passions (if not the effects of those passions) is accounted for in the construction of the origins of feeling. I want to suggest that the effect of this concurrence between Smithian and Humean sympathies *is* the mid-Victorian emphasis on the limited amelioration of bodily circumstance over more meaningful systemic changes to the polity.

It is therefore tempting to argue that Hume's sympathy of contagion continues to circulate purely in descriptions of working-class unrest and in reports of violent demonstrations, while Smith's imaginative sympathy, perhaps more persuasively, theorises both the formal

---

[128] For example, while the riot does pose a physical threat to both Sybil Gerard and Margaret Hale in their respective novels, neither are particularly susceptible to the unsocial passions ('anger and resentment') of the crowd. Rather, Margaret 'reads' Boucher's face outside of Thronton's Mill and translates his 'desperat[ion]' and 'rage' into intervention and understanding, she is not compelled to join them by the unconscious transmission of feelings or ideas. (Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 176).

qualities of narrative fictions and the necessary limits of middle-class attempts to feel along with

the poor. And, as I will show in the following section, Carlyle's repeated configuration of the

working-class as 'mute', 'inarticulate' and requiring translation—"'Guide me, govern me! I am

mad and miserable, and cannot guide myself!'"— purports to interpret the feelings of the

working-class while really inventing them.[129] Such readings might suggest that Carlyle represents

a bridge of sorts between the conflicting aspects of contagious and cognitive sympathy; we might

say Carlyle dramatizes the unchecked spread of unsocial passions through the British and French

proletariat and translates these into rational desires for the benefit of the middle-class spectator/

reader. Of course, if the sympathies of middle-class readers function as Smith suggests they

should, such 'translations' must necessarily contain, or modify 'the pitch', of working-class

suffering to that with which spectators at their ease can feel along.[130] Doing so would seem to

suggest that Carlyle combines the sympathetic models of Hume and Smith in a way that

emphasises the enduring practical value of both. However, constituting Carlyle's deployment of

sympathy as a mere response to, or even unconscious incarnation of Enlightenment ideals of

social cohesion reduces his intentional break from the regularity of the systematic universe

proposed by the moral philosophers into obscurity, and minimises his scepticism of

Enlightenment rationality.

    In the following section I will argue that we ought not dismiss Carlyle's intentional

departure from the legacy of the Enlightenment, and take seriously his 'reject[ion of] the

regressive and mechanical political structures of the eighteenth century'.[131] The thematic

importance of time and timeliness across his work from "Signs of the Times" (1829), *The French

Revolution* and *Past and Present* demonstrate that we should not take for granted the status of

concepts inherited from Enlightenment rationality, doubly so because Carlyle was deliberate in

---

[129] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 33.

[130] For more on the containment of working-class desires and political aspirations through novelistic interpretation, see: Chapter III on Frances Milton Trollope and *Michael Armstrong*.

[131] Fred Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle, A Biography*, (London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 147.

both response and rejection. Indeed, rationality itself is at issue in Carlyle's frame, and while it may be tempting to reduce the combination of mechanism and dynamism advocated in "Signs of the Times" to a metaphorical combination of the body and intellect, and by extension, a combination of Humean and Smithian sympathies, it must be noted that Carlyle himself did not draw any strong distinctions between David Hume and Adam Smith; he simply disagreed with them both. Instead, I want to suggest that the distinctions between mind and body are far more complicated in Carlyle's political thought; in both *Chartism* and *The French Revolution* Carlyle demonstrates the effects of the body on the mind, and how bodily circumstances give rise to reasonable, intelligent and recognisable passions. *The French Revolution*, in particular, stresses that the consciousness of shared humanity drives sympathetic identification in both the real world and in the text. For Carlyle, then, intellectual sympathy is not only the purview of the upper-classes and bodily sympathy is not only the affliction of the poor, but man, in general, is subject to both.

(II) 'This Noble Omnipotence of Sympathy', Thomas Carlyle and the Condition-of-England[132]

The purpose of this section is to locate an examination of aesthetic sympathy within a fully nineteenth-century context through the work of Thomas Carlyle, a dominant figure in Victorian intellectual culture, staunch critic of materialistic political economy, and 'prophet' of the industrial age.[133] In literary scholarship, Carlyle often figures as central to the critique of laissez-faire non-governance and is usefully illustrative of the conservative interpretation of the political condition of the industrial working class. *The French Revolution: A History* (1837), *Chartism* (1840) and *Past and Present* (1843) frequently feature in criticism of the Victorian industrial novel. Carlyle is also responsible for coining the phrase 'Condition-of-England' and for introducing the content

---

[132] Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, The Works of Thomas Carlyle in Thirty Volumes*, Vol. 27, Book 3, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1899), p. 57.

[133] John D Rosenberg, *Carlyle and the Burden of History*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 7.

and form of the 'question' of the working classes—on whom meaning would be inscribed, —or the controlling metaphor that has united this set of novels both within the nineteenth century and in modern literary criticism. In spite of a clear emphasis on meeting the needs of the modern moment, from Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* (1958) to Catherine Gallagher's *The Body Economic* (2006), Carlyle's identification of the condition of the poor as the central riddle of his contemporary society, alongside his scepticism of the increasingly democratic aspirations of working-class political organisation have come to represent one, backward-looking aspect of the 'Janus-faced' response to the industrial present.[134] However, Carlyle's histories, essays and pamphlets offer a useful conceptual bridge from the legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment to a network of Victorian thinkers and writers, offering a referendum of sorts on the *a priori* assumptions of the moral philosophers in light of the revolutionary past/present. Crucially, his best-known works are contemporaneous with the novels central to this study, and therefore of more use in generating a snapshot of how sympathy was popularly understood and mobilised in mid-century prose than the outmoded works of Hume and Smith. Instead, Carlyle articulates and shapes the conscious experience of 'the present' within the frame of nineteenth-century industrialism, challenging both the scrutability of social cohesion in a purely mechanistic universe and the immutability of virtue by reading and writing the past.

Still, the works of Thomas Carlyle do not seem to lend themselves naturally to the discourse on Victorian novelistic sympathy as it has emerged in recent years. Carlyle's argumentative style, propped up by a tendency toward *reductio ad absurdum*, can be difficult to reconcile with either the orderly blueprints of sympathy as the origin, mode of development and ends of human morality theorised by Hume and Smith, or as an aesthetic principle of fiction, through which the richness and complexity of the inner life of the other can be accessed and rendered compatible with the desires and aspirations of the self.[135] On one hand, Carlyle does

---

[134] Susan Zlotnick, *Women, Writing and the Industrial Revolution*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 1.
[135] Kaplan, p. 270.

not write explicitly *about* sympathy in the way that Hume and Smith do; as demonstrated in the

previous section, the moral philosophers approached the topic of sympathy with techniques

inspired by the scientific method: they hypothesised that virtue is a natural quality of inherently

social man and set about proving this assumption with anecdotes intended to demonstrate a

proliferation of natural, universal sympathetic attachments. By contrast, Carlyle's meditations on

the past and present state of society are often conflicted, polemical and obscured by extended,

complex metaphors.[136] He tends to be less methodical in unpacking and defining the subject of

sympathy, which is often secondary to his injunction to *read* the meaning of the present, cast-off

the ineffectual conventions of the past and *do* something.[137] On the other hand, Carlyle's

superficial depictions of the working class as a homogenous group, particularly in *Chartism* and

Past and Present, provide neither the complex density of detail to engender sympathy formally

through realism, nor imaginative insight into the desires of the individual that might engender

sympathy through romance.

   Yet, Carlyle is not entirely silent on the subject of sympathy, which he casts as both

catalyst of radical social change *and* essential to his vision of just governance by a '*real*

aristocracy'—by which he means a meritocratic 'corporation of the Best and Bravest'.[138] Still, the

conservatism of his ultimate rejection of democracy, exacerbated by an apparent retreat into

proto-authoritarianism in his later career, at first appears incongruous with the apparently

formative and benign ends of sympathy.[139] But sympathy as expressed by the moral

philosophers, and as it has come to be regarded by criticism of the Victorian novel, is clearly in

service of the status quo, and therefore fundamentally conservative in nature. This is a critique

which has long been levelled at the narrative 'solutions' to the problem of working-class political

aspirations in the novels of Dickens, Disraeli, Gaskell and Eliot as well. But, the impulse to read

---

[136] Fred Kaplan, p. 184.
[137] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 257.
[138] Carlyle, *Chartism*, pp. 34-5.
[139] Lowell T Fyre, '"This Offensive and Alarming Set of Pamphlets": Thomas Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* and the Condition of England in 1850', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, (2012), 45.1, 113-38, p. 115.

the Victorian deployment of sympathy as a conservative tool that refocuses the energies of the newly enfranchised middle class on the morality of feeling and individual charity, rather than encouraging meaningful political reform, only accounts for a part of Carlyle's message and method. Carlyle does not simply write *about* sympathy as a tool that casts off the 'sham' of past 'Habit'—which, for him serves no purpose in contemporary society,—rather, as I will demonstrate, the ability to sympathise, or know the feelings of the poor, is a key indicator of Carlyle's 'real aristocracy'.

Further, in spite of Carlyle's explicit dismissal of fiction as a morally or intellectually productive genre, and alongside polemical challenges to reader comprehension and capability, his clear desire to inspire the conviction to *act* is easily accommodated within the apparent aspirations of industrial fiction in general, and the Victorian belief in the transformative capacity of sympathy in particular.[140] He cultivates the sympathies of his readers through parallelism, authorial asides, and a new, imaginative approach to writing history, effectively using prose to generate a sympathetic society of readers.[141] Whereas both Hume and Smith use sympathetic responses to art objects merely as examples of the widespread adoption of imaginary sentiments (Smith through several short allusions to the act of reading, and Hume through the extended illustration of the operation of the theatre), it is, perhaps ironically, Carlyle that theorises how sympathetic identification with *the text* may have the potential to produce meaningful social relationships in the real world. This, as others have argued, is the key development of the realist novel, and an essential, if naively optimistic, aim of the industrial fiction of the mid-century. But, at the risk of splitting hairs given the innovative, novel-like qualities of Carlyle's *French Revolution* and sections of *Past and Present*, it is necessary to acknowledge that these are histories and *not* fictions.[142]

---

[140] Kaplan, p. 270.
[141] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 95; p. 169.
[142] Rosenberg, p. 31.

Perhaps it goes without saying that shifting my focus to sympathy in the nineteenth century does not mean that we can fully leave the eighteenth century behind. David Hume, in particular, was an important figure in the work of Thomas Carlyle, whom Carlyle often figured as emblematic of the errors of applying 'Atheist' logic to explain the workings of the universe.[143] And it is true that the mechanics, not only of sympathy and sympathising, but of the broader development of society and its function, as they are laid out by Hume and Smith, do continue to have currency within nineteenth-century thought. Hume specifically, and Smith by extension, are fundamental to the philosophical positions and moral reasoning of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill for instance, whom Carlyle often configured as direct descendants of their eighteenth-century forebearers.[144] Indeed, Carlyle's disdain for 'Benthamite' philosophy throughout *Past and Present*—frequently alluded to as 'your Greatest-Happiness principle'—is twinned with his rejection of the systematic universe theorised by the moral philosophers.[145] His work , therefore, is rightly read as a conscious break with these figures, if not as explicit in his sketch of the ends of the development of society—'Alas, my friends, Society exists and has existed for many reasons not so easy to specify!'—then certainly in railing against the flawed reasoning of past and current thinkers.[146] Whether or not Carlyle's persistent conflation of Bentham with Hume is a fair or accurate representation of either's position is, of course, beside the point.[147] What is important here is that this conflation speaks to lingering assumptions about the morality of 'happiness', the ends of a life well-lived and the effectiveness of sympathy in immunising against rampant self-interest, which are all positions Carlyle challenges in his articulation of the Condition-of-England question. Thus, Carlyle is consciously breaking from the conventionality of assumptions held by the moral philosophers and their belief in a universe reduced to simple mechanical processes. He, perhaps more clearly than any of his contemporaries, argues that the

---

[143] Carlyle, 'Signs', pp. 64-5.
[144] Jordan, p. 558.
[145] Carlyle, *Past and Present,* p. 191.
[146] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 37.
[147] Jordan, p. 558.

French Revolution has revealed the hollowness of Enlightenment assumptions about the ends of society itself, and in so doing, offers a parallel conception of sympathy that stresses unreasoning and interiority.

Thus, there are two prongs to my unpacking of Carlyle's reframing of sympathy and its role in social formation. In the first instance, it is worth noting where Carlyle fits in an intellectual history of sympathy. This encompasses Carlyle's response to not only the theoretical assumptions about sympathy and virtue made by Hume, but also the problems Carlyle associates with the Humean application of contrived 'logic' to otherwise spontaneous and natural relationships.[148] Carlyle, like Smith and Hume, also configures sympathy as a natural and universal quality of the human experience, however, Carlyle's use of 'natural' and 'universal' diverges quite dramatically from that of the moral philosophers. Indeed, for Carlyle, 'Habit', in the form of deference to the failed conventions of eighteenth-century institutions and thought, is an inhibitor of real sympathetic understanding, and it is only through confrontation with truths (linguistic and corporeal) that *real* knowledge and understanding can be achieved. In this section, my aim is to both qualify Carlyle's dismissal of Enlightenment sympathy, and to assemble the terms of this dismissal into a new version of sympathy—say, Carlylean sympathy—that might more holistically represent this domain in the early-Victorian period. This sympathy is a necessary precursor to Carlyle's social re-formation, by which I do not mean paltry social-political reform, which he regarded with scepticism, but a fundamental reorganisation of society that privileges both the natural and the divine.

In the second section, I want to look more practically at the techniques Carlyle deploys in his own work to create the conditions for sympathetic bonds between the reader and the text. In this section I will demonstrate how Carlyle's emphasis on his non-interventions as an author/narrator supports this conviction that sympathy is a natural state of being and not inhibited by

---

[148] Carlyle, 'Signs', p. 64.

Smith's rules of positive social formation. Rather, Carlylean sympathy runs rampant throughout *The French Revolution* in service of all manner of political orientations and unsocial behaviours and demanding reader engagement. Where Enlightenment sympathy is characterised by its passivity—whether that refers to Humean emotional infection, or the Smithian substitution of approbation for action—Carlyle's sympathy is active, and radically so.

(i) 'All is well that works quietly'; Carlyle's Rejection of the Moral Philosophers[149]

Carlyle's reappropriation of sympathy is central to his critique of the 'Mechanical Age' that forms the crux of 'Signs of the Times' (1829) and is an open indictment of the methodology of the moral philosophers. But Carlyle's epithet, 'the Age of Machinery' refers, only in part, to the progress of modern industry so that 'nothing is now done directly, or by hand'. [150] The whole of Carlyle's critique of mechanism in contemporary society is that the ethos of 'rule and calculated contrivance', of 'cunningly devised implements' and 'preestablished apparatus' is no longer confined to the expansion of industry, but has 'diffused itself into quite other provinces' and altered both the internal and social states of man. [151] To this end, Carlyle writes, 'the same habit regulates not our modes of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men have grown mechanical in head and heart, as well as in hand'. [152] Crucially, the habit of mechanism displaces the 'spontaneous' and 'old' 'natural force[s]' that previously informed man's experience of the social world.[153] Additionally, Carlyle's juxtaposition of thought and feeling turned mechanical recalls Hume's delineation between 'feeling and thinking' in *Human Nature*.[154] Hume's object in distinguishing between the two is to illustrate how thought is readily transmuted into

---

[149] Carlyle, 'Signs', p. 75.
[150] *Ibid.* p. 59.
[151] *Ibid.* pp. 59-60.
[152] *Ibid.* pp. 62-63.
[153] *Ibid.* p. 60; p. 63.
[154] Hume, *Human Nature*, p. 2.

feeling in the subject's mind without their conscious intervention, which is both a result of the natural operation of human sympathy and, Hume extrapolates, the cornerstone of the social virtues. Carlyle, on the other hand, is less interested in the origins of these phenomena (thinking and feeling) and more interested in exposing the flaws in this kind of reasoning. For Carlyle, that sympathy enables the spread of emotions and ideas is readily observable, but the consequences of the sympathetic emotions are, like the reasons for society itself, 'not so easy to specify'.[155]As I will demonstrate in the following paragraphs, Carlyle links this turn toward internal mechanism explicitly with the 'decay[ed]' state of British moral philosophy, and to John Locke, David Hume, Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham in particular.

Most damningly, he argues, the 'Metaphysical and Moral Sciences' are no longer 'spiritual philosoph[ies]' but 'material one[s],' the effect of which being 'what cannot be investigated and understood mechanically, cannot be investigated and understood at all'.[156] Carlyle positions Locke and his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1695) at the head of this decline in 'sciences' of 'the inward persuasion', the premises of which, he suggests, are embraced and expanded upon by David Hume.[157] Indeed, much of Carlyle's critique of Locke's *Essay* can also be fairly levelled at Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, which in 1748 he distilled into the shorter, more polemical, and referentially titled, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Of the *Essay* Carlyle writes, 'it is not a philosophy of the mind: it is a mere discussion of the origin of our consciousness, or ideas, or whatever else they are called; a genetic history of what we see *in* the mind' [original emphasis].[158] As with his conflation of Hume and Bentham, in reconstructing the misguided history of British moral philosophy in order to discard and reject what he sees as an over-emphasis on cold logic and pre-formed apparatus, Carlyle deliberately accentuates the resemblance between those he fundamentally disagrees with. In this case, he offers a critique of

---

[155] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 37.
[156] Carlyle, 'Signs', p. 63; p. 66
[157] *Ibid.* p. 64
[158] *Ibid.* p. 64.

Locke's *Essay* that, in being configured as directly antecedent to Hume's *Enquiry* and *Treatise*, presages the methodological failings of the latter. Thus, Carlyle's summary of Locke's essay is functionally a summary of the problems in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, which purports to explain the origins of and differences between the phenomena of thinking (ideas) and feeling (impressions), but in locating their origins outside of the mind, fails to grasp their real significance.

Carlyle further implicates Hume in the calcification of human interiority into pure mechanism, writing,

The last class of our Scotch Metaphysicians had a dim view that much of this was wrong […] the singular conclusions at which Hume […] was arriving, brought this school into being […] they tugged lustily at the logical chain by which Hume was so coldly towing them and the world into bottomless abysses of Atheism and Fatalism.[159]

Thus, Carlyle challenges the very application of external logic, inductive reasoning, and a wholly knowable universe—all hallmarks of Enlightenment philosophy—to divining the 'inward primary powers of man'.[160] The inner state of man is an imagined standard Carlyle uses throughout his work to combat what he sees as the artificiality of Enlightenment constructs. This is somewhat ironic given the emphasis that Hume, Smith and virtually all of eighteenth-century moral philosophy placed on the naturalness of sympathy and of social formation. As such, it is worth briefly noting the significant differences with which nature and the natural world were conceived.

To make a very complicated subject very brief, as the Enlightenment progressed moral philosophy was deeply influenced by parallel developments in the sciences. These developments were founded on the successes of Newtonian physics which began with *a priori* knowledge about the natural world, then set about proving these theorems by the application of mathematics.[161]

---

[159]*Ibid.* pp. 64-65.
[160] *Ibid.* p. 69.
[161] Pierre Kerszberg, 'Natural Philosophy' in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen, Vol. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 873-902, p. 873.

The moral philosophers' approach to questions about sociability and the human experience more or less shared this 'epistemic base' and 'obsession with nature and the natural', so that 'moral philosophers and political economists of the long eighteenth century clearly expressed a belief in an "intrinsic tendency in Nature toward progress or an ultimate goal"[…] Further, they saw human purpose and action as a part of this natural system'.[162] Thus, the 'natural' in this understanding is not only measurable, but predictable, constantly moving toward benevolent progress.

There are two complementary reasons for Carlyle's resistance to this teleological understanding of nature. First, the inherent transparency of this philosophy of nature is largely incompatible with the romantic understanding of nature's otherness and sublimity.[163] Second, was a Protestant view of divine omniscience and intervention that suggested 'a priori logic limited God's fiat power' and challenged the notion that 'human beings have immanent within them the logic and reason of the universe and can thus discover purpose in the world through a series of deductions and by following their own natural inclinations'.[164] Carlyle's Calvinist upbringing and his romantic understanding of history and the natural world culminated in his utter rejection of the moral philosophers; hence, his consistent conflation of the natural with the divine, his repeated positioning of both as forces that resist human understanding, and his dismissal of formula and contrivance to explain contemporary social conditions.

Finally, this last critique of Hume is significant, not only for its resistance to Hume's indiscriminate application of 'logic' to the mysteries of internal man, but also because it forecasts Carlyle's framing of similar flaws in Benthamite constructions of man from *Past and Present*. In Book III *The Modern Worker,* Carlyle returns the reader to the present from the history of Jocelin of Brakelond and the monastery at Bury-St. Edmonds. In transitioning from the latter to the

---

[162] Torre, pp. 647- 48.
[163] Onno Oerlemans and Katherine Neilson Rankin, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 4-5.
[164] Torre, p. 660.

former, Carlyle argues that in contemporary society 'Moral Philosophies, sanctioned by able

computations of Profit and Loss' and 'a Greatest-Happiness Principle' have supplanted religion

and 'God's absolute laws' in modern culture.[165] In this configuration, Carlyle collapses together

moral philosophy, some of the best known (if misrepresented) principles of political economy

and secular 'happiness', treating them as virtually synonymous.[166] In a chapter devoted to the

concept of happiness, Carlyle's critique of Bentham becomes even more severe: 'does not the

whole wretchedness, the *Atheism* as I call it, of man's ways, in these generations shadow itself for

us in that unspeakable Life philosophy of his: the pretension to be what he calls "happy"?'

[original emphasis].[167] Carlyle's choice of 'atheism' as the central descriptor of this critique does

double-duty. Firstly, it identifies Bentham as a disciple of Hume's, both of whom were famously

'irreligious', and in Carlyle's view, responsible for 'towing' moral philosophy and metaphysics

away from eternal truths and a meaningful philosophy *of* the mind.[168] Secondly, it identifies

Bentham's 'happiness principle' as an object of scorn due to its prioritisation of the satisfaction

of individual, material and worldly desires over spiritual fulfilment. For Carlyle there exists a

fundamental discord between external materialism and spiritual interiority, which comes to be

representative of both the desiccation of moral philosophy and the diseased state of

contemporary society. Carlyle continues his critique of Benthamite materialism, quoting, "'the

word *Soul* with us, as in some Slavonic dialects, seems to be synonymous with Stomach". We

plead and speak in our Parliaments and elsewhere, not as from the Soul, but from the

Stomach'.[169] Essentially, Carlyle argues that the simple amelioration of the material effects of

poverty will not answer the 'Sphinx-riddle' of the day. The poor do not simply need 'more

---

[165] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 177.
[166] Equating moral philosophy with political economy is another familiar technique adopted in literary responses to urban poverty and unemployment, particularly where the New Poor Law was at issue. One example of this is Mr Bumble's criticism of juries in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1839). Bumble, in rejecting their finding that a tradesman died because of his miserliness as the relieving officer scoffs, 'Juries is ineddicated, vulgar, grovelling wretches [...] they haven't no more philosophy nor political economy about 'em than that'. (London: Penguin Books, 2003) p. 29.
[167] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 190.
[168] Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Scepticism, Naturalism and Irreligion,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 285.
[169] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 190.

bacon'—though, it is evident in both *Chartism* and *The French Revolution* they certainly do need more food.[170] Still, the apotheosis of the stomach works to diagnose the spiritual vacuum of modern society. Thus, Carlyle's critique demonstrates how the drive to achieve temporal happiness and material satisfaction dislodges and distracts from the real problems of the day.

Furthermore, it is really in *Past and Present* that Carlyle offers a clear alternative to the externalised origins of 'thinking and feeling'. In answering the 'Morrison's-Pill hypothesis', or, the belief that a simple, single solution to the 'problem' of the working classes exists, Carlyle counters, 'thou shalt descend into thy inner man and see if there be any traces of a *soul* there […] we must […] exchange […] our dead hearts of stone for living hearts of flesh'.[171] This likening of accessing one's soul to a descent into interiority (rather than an intellectual or moral ascent) is an unusual, but key construction that Carlyle first developed in 'Signs'. As Lawrence Poston reminds us, 'Signs' was ostensibly a review of three other works: *Anticipation, or an Hundred Years Hence* (a now-lost pamphlet), William Alexander Mackinnon's *The Rise, Progress and Present State of Public Opinion in Great Britain*, and Edward Irving's Millenarian pamphlet, *The Last Days*.[172] Carlyle explicitly rejected the apocalyptic thread in his long-standing friend's thought, which the opening volley of 'Signs'—lamenting the spread of vaticination and other neutralising frenzies—makes apparent.[173] Crucially, Carlyle's assertion that religious spirituality has been displaced by moral philosophy and political economy—both species of mechanistic sciences—must not be misconstrued as a retreat into simple religious prescription that makes virtues out of indifference and withdrawal. To trust in the divine but do nothing would only enable the continuance of laissez-faire 'Donothingism' that, for Carlyle, is one source of contemporary unrest.[174] In Carlyle's version of a prescriptive philosophy, which purports to add spirituality and interiority

---

[170] *Ibid.* p. 191.
[171] *Ibid.* p. 90.
[172] Lawrence Poston, "Millites and Millenarians: The Context of Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times'" (1983), *Victorian Studies*, 26.4, 381-406, p. 382.
[173] *Ibid.* p. 392.
[174] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 39.

back into the vacuum created by the over-abundance of mechanism, he emphasises the creed of individual power and activity. That being said, the material conditions of life, particularly as they affect the poor, are an object of serious concern for Carlyle, illuminated by the constant presence of unhealthy bodies and fleshy metaphors.

(ii) Dynamic Sympathy

In the following two sections I want to demonstrate that in spite of Carlyle's criticism of Bentham above, which focuses on material satisfaction of the figurative stomach, the materiality of the body is not incompatible with Carlyle's understanding of dynamism and interiority. Rather, it is through the body, particularly through bodily vulnerabilities to hunger, disease and ultimately death, that sympathetic identification with the other occurs. Furthermore, Carlyle implicates sympathy itself in the healthy functioning of the social body, though he by no means considers it to be a purely constructive force. I will start by reading Carlyle's definition of sympathy in the opening of 'Signs of the Times', in order to show how his understanding of sympathy positions it as a dynamic force which opposes the regularity of the mechanical systems articulated by Hume and Smith. This passage from 'Signs' explicitly locates the experience of sympathy within the body, as opposed to in the mind. In this way, Carlylean sympathy ironically ends up more contagious even than Hume's emotions, as his repeated use of the metaphor of the body politic to gauge social health demonstrates. This also provides a new lens through which to read the Condition-of-England question, which has long been interpreted as a metaphorical diagnosis of the political and social problems facing contemporary England. I want to suggest that to read the Condition-of-England question in this light misses out on the actual hungry and ailing bodies that the question draws attention to. Still, Carlyle predicts this lapse and takes pains to connect the condition of the body to the emotional experiences that proliferate during periods of political upheaval. Finally, I want to end my discussion of Carlyle by turning to the dramatic execution of Louis XVI in *The French Revolution*. This powerful scene, especially

when contrasted against Smith's representative hanged man in *Moral Sentiments*, hammers home the universality of the human body as a necessary precursor to sympathy (against Smith's disembodied imagination). Taken altogether, Carlyle's treatment of vulnerable bodies and contagious feelings is illustrative of the conceptual legacy left to the industrial novels.

Carlyle's critique of sympathy as it is presented by the moral philosophers first appears in 'Signs of the Times', where he introduces sympathy as a dynamic force with destructive as well as constructive potential. In the opening paragraphs of the essay Carlyle outlines his argument that contemporary disinterest in the present, exemplified by the spread of 'vaticination' and other 'frenzies', is a symptom of social disease, in part, because it indicates an inappropriate elevation of the promise of a distant future over the needful activity of the present.[175] If this were not so, he argues, the 'happy' and 'wise' man would both be 'full of the present, for its bounty suffices' and 'duties engage them'.[176] Rather, Carlyle marks a tendency of his present society to look instead into the 'obscure distance' and, in so doing, become 'idl[e]' and impotent.[177] Furthermore, according to Carlyle, this disease does not afflict only the 'unhappy' and 'ambitious', but spreads, by the operations of sympathy, throughout entire nations:

For here the prophets are not one, but many and each confirms and incites the other, so that the fatidical fury spreads wider and wider, till at last even Saul must join in. For there is still a real magic in the action and reaction of minds on one another. The casual deliration of a few becomes, by this mysterious reverberation, the frenzy of many; men lose the use, not only of their understandings, but of their bodily senses; while the most obdurate, unbelieving hearts melt, like the rest, in the furnace where all are cast as victims and as fuel. It is grievous to think, that this noble omnipotence of Sympathy has been so rarely the Aaron's-rod of Truth and Virtue, and so often the Enchanter's-rod of Wickedness and Folly![178]

The sympathetic process that Carlyle describes in this passage bears only an uneasy resemblance to the invisible, productively social force that is detailed by Hume and Smith, wherein the process of 'fellow-feeling' at least appears to reproduce passionate, but positive emotions within

---

[175] *Ibid.* p. 56.
[176] *Ibid.* p. 56.
[177] *Ibid.* p. 59.
[178] *Ibid.* pp. 56-57.

communities. Earlier in the chapter I detailed the various convergences and divergences between the Humean and Smithian depictions of sympathy. In sum: Hume suggests that ideas (thoughts) first form in the mind of the observer, primarily by the interpretation of external signals enacted by the other (the sufferer). These ideas rapidly and passively transform into impressions (feelings) that accord exactly with those of the other. Sympathy, therefore, expresses this concurrence of feeling. Smith, on the other hand, constitutes sympathy as a process primarily of self-reflection, whereby the spectator imagines how they might feel in the physical circumstances of the other and feels *those* feelings; to what degree the spectator's feelings accord with the *signalled*—not actual—feelings of the other tells us the *degree* of sympathy experienced. This can range from perfect, or complete sympathy, to partial, or incomplete sympathy, to none at all, or sympathy instead with the object of the other's scorn.

Carlyle, on the other hand, describes something fundamentally different in this passage. Here, he is not writing on an interaction between two individuals only, but the interplay between the individual and society writ large. Where Hume's work on sympathy implicitly reflects its operation within a small community of his peers, and Smith's *Moral Sentiments* uses bespoke examples of the impact of sympathetic emotions on his readership contrasted against those of 'the mob', by the early nineteenth century, the fervour of sympathetic emotions had been observed to have meaningful consequences for all. Thus, Carlylean sympathy is more thoroughly and intentionally universalised than either form of Enlightenment sympathy. This passage from 'Signs' imagines a new relationship between sympathy and the impassioned crowd which can only be a post-revolutionary reality; and here, the sweeping omnipotence of communal feeling culminates in the unconscious embodiment of sentiment in the individual.

For Carlyle sympathy *is* the 'mysterious', irresistible operation by which minds act on, and react to one another, spreading the passions 'wider and wider' throughout communities where all are susceptible to them; but according to this passage, this process only occasionally develops the virtues, and far more often begets 'Wickedness and Folly'. That Carlyle's sympathy

does not resist wickedness, folly and frenzy as Smith suggests it should do in *Moral Sentiments*, but indiscriminately enables their transmittance is illustrative of the wider shift in nineteenth-century representations of sympathy that Fairclough suggests is embedded in the British reactionary response to the French Revolution. I argue that while Carlyle is consciously challenging the purely formative sympathy theorised by Hume and Smith, this does not mean that Carlylean sympathy is therefore the purely destructive force Fairclough identifies as the new post-revolutionary norm. Rather, Carlylean sympathy can still be ultimately beneficial to the development of society because Carlyle recognises in the operation of sympathy a dynamic force that serves to illuminate and dismantle 'Sham and Semblance' and instigate an 'all-but impossible return to Nature, and her veracities and her integrities'.[179]

In the metaphorical 'furnace' of the sympathetic process 'where all are cast as victims and as fuel' Carlyle underscores the violent potential embedded in the irresistible universality of sympathetic feelings and ideas. Indeed, in replacing the sufferer/ spectator configuration with victim/ fuel, Carlyle's version of the sympathetic process is divested of both the *illusion* of impartiality and of Smithian sympathy's inherent power imbalance. Like Hume's sympathy of contagion, Carlyle's metaphorical substitution of the process of fellow-feeling for both the incinerating and forging operation of the furnace has, at the very least, a semi-destructive compelling effect on the passive individual. This is made more apparent by the unconditional nature of the passage of Carlyle's sympathetic emotions; his assertion that men in the grip of the frenzy of sympathy 'lose the use, not only of their understandings, but of their bodily senses,' marks it as not just an emotional, or intellectual phenomenon, but a physical one. In this way, by locating sympathy in the body rather than in the judgement, Carlylean sympathy cleaves closer to the natural and universal experience that Smith and Hume both rhetorically attribute to sympathy, but which their class-based examples don't seem to support. That being said, later on

---

[179] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 91; p. 88.

in 'Signs', Carlyle does make space for the man unafflicted by popular frenzy, whose 'well-grounded faith' helps him to resist the worst effects of omnipotent sympathy.[180]

Additionally, Carlyle's sympathy of 'mysterious reverberations' parallels the tactile physicality of Hume's 'correspondent movements in the breast', at the same time that it echoes the sonic metaphor in Smith's meditations on the proper 'pitch' of passionate expression. As noted in the preceding section, Smith uses 'pitch' to signify the intensity of the passions, explicitly arguing that it is necessary for the sufferer to adjust the external signs of their internal feelings to match what the spectator can 'freely go along with'.[181] For Smith, failure to regulate the pitch of one's emotions is antithetical to the forging of sympathetic bonds and bolsters his argument that sympathy is procreant of morality. For Carlyle, sympathy requires no such internal regulation, and its potential for transmitting destabilising, antisocial emotional and intellectual content is made clear in his account of sympathy 'incit[ing] […] fury', 'deliration' and 'distemper'.[182] Rather, the process by which these frenzies spread, while certainly identifiable as the action of sympathy, resists the concrete, scientific, systematic and/ or mechanistic explanations offered by Smith and Hume. Here, Carlyle emphasises this failure of the moral philosophers to account for sympathy's destructive potential—exemplified in this essay not only by the French Revolution, but also the Popish Plot, Salem Witch Trials and in 'mitigated form […] of pretty regular recurrence'—by redefining the sympathetic process as both magical and mysterious.[183] Moreover, in figuring sympathy as a 'furnace' where 'unbelieving hearts melt', Carlyle unites the mind (ideas) and body (sensation) through the metonymic heart, such that the heart is both linguistic figuration and concrete presence; it is both the dynamic 'mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, [and] Religion,' and a mechanical organ of the body, spiritually and physically enabling life.[184] In a word, the melting hearts in

---

[180] Carlyle, 'Signs', p. 57.
[181] Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, p. 57.
[182] Carlyle, 'Signs', p. 57.
[183] *Ibid.* p. 57
[184] Carlyle, 'Signs' p. 68.

'Signs' anticipates the injunction in *Past and Present* to exchange unfeeling hearts of stone for sympathetic hearts of flesh.

Furthermore, Carlyle makes clear the interdependence of sympathetic experience and internal spirituality, so that the 'well-grounded faith' of the man with the lantern is not incompatible with the deep feelings that sympathy enables.[185] In alluding to Saul amongst the prophets, Carlyle likens the potency of sympathy to the compelling power of the holy spirit (not for the last time in this essay), and in so doing marks out sympathy as a force which wholly surpasses human understanding. With this allusion, Carlyle effectively shifts sympathy away from Hume's logical (and atheistic) systems and into the domain of 'instinctive, unbounded force'.[186] I want to suggest that this move both naturalises the experience of sympathy in its constructive and destructive forms, while it introduces an explicitly Christian dimension to the Victorian sympathetic formulation that is largely absent from its Enlightenment predecessor. Indeed, for Carlyle, the principle of dynamic sympathy and the sharing of sentiment are the very foundations of the Christian church. In 'Signs' Carlyle constructs the dynamic origins of the evangelical tradition:

How did Christianity arise and spread abroad among men? Was it by institutions, and establishments and well-arranged systems of mechanism? Not so [...] It arose in the mystic deeps of man's soul; and was spread abroad by the "preaching of the word," by simple, altogether natural and individual efforts; and flew, like hallowed fire, from heart to heart, till all were purified and illuminated by it.[187]

This is a reference that likely would have been more familiar to the Victorian reader than it is now. Carlyle alludes to the Pentecost, when tongues of flame (visual representations of the Holy Spirit,) descended unto earth and allowed the disciples to literally speak in other languages and spread the word of God.[188] This allusion is also made by Charles Kingsley in *Yeast* (1848) to

---

[185] *Ibid.* p. 57.
[186] *Ibid.* p. 69.
[187] *Ibid.* p. 70.
[188] *Acts* 2: 1-12.

similar effect; Lancelot argues that the love for God awakens love for all men, for 'love is like a flame—light as many fresh flames with it as you will, it grows, instead of diminishing by the dispersion'.[189] In both cases, the flame is a visual representation of community development, and the kindling of other lights, an illustration of its exponential, reinforcing nature. Many have discussed the abundance of fire and flames in Carlyle's work; this is especially true in the case of *The French Revolution*, where the manuscript was famously mistook for rubbish and burned at the home of John Stuart Mill.[190] As Carlyle uses it here, the flame is symbolic of that which allows men to understand one another; it is both the tongue that begets communication, and the light that illuminates divine nature's 'veracities' and 'integrities'. However, as his invocation of *Acts* suggests, this has nothing to do with the founding of institutions, the establishment of societies, or the circulation of 'periodical[s]', and 'monthly or quarterly magazine[s].'[191] Rather, the flame, lantern and forge unify the inward powers of man with natural communities. Still, even before the fateful burning of *The French Revolution*, Carlyle recognises that flames cannot always be controlled. It is, therefore, necessary to point out that Carlyle does not position dynamism as an unqualified alternative to mechanism but argues 'that only in the right coordination of the two, and the vigorous forwarding of *both*, does our true action lie'.[192]

(iii) The Condition-of-England Question and a Proliferation of Unhealthy Bodies

The 'Condition-of-England question', a phrase coined by Carlyle in his 1840 pamphlet *Chartism*, has become a useful contextual tool for grouping various kinds of literature from the late-1830s to the mid-60s, primarily around the contemporary material and political experience of the working classes in the first half of the nineteenth century.[193] A common feature of the

---

[189] Charles Kingsley, *Yeast: A Problem*, (Phoenix Mill: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1994), p. 68.
[190] Kaplan, p. 218.
[191] Carlyle, 'Signs', p. 61.
[192] *Ibid.* p. 73.
[193] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 9.

classic grouping of 'Condition-of-England' novels, as it was constructed in the mid-twentieth

century, is the dramatization of the transformation of material dis-ease amongst the working

classes (in the form of scarcity of food, secure employment and housing, sickness, injury and

death) into full-blown political disease (in the form of rick-burning, riots, strikes, National

Petitions, and the spectre of democratisation). This transformation, a key indicator that a work

belongs in the Condition-of-England genre, is forecast in Carlyle's initial framing of the

Condition-of-England question, where he argues 'the condition of the great body of people in a

country is the condition of the country itself'.[194] This metonymic substitution of a part of society

for the whole is by no means unique to Carlyle, especially given the prominence of the body

politic as the preferred metaphor for socio-political organisation and health.[195] Indeed, that the

'great body' of society was largely made up of 'servants, labourers and workmen of all kinds', and

that it is therefore the condition of *these* citizens that political institutions exist to maintain, is an

essential, if occasionally neglected, conclusion in Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.[196] In this sense,

Carlyle's employment of the body politic is relatively unexceptional; he extrapolates the social,

political and economic problems stagnating contemporary England by first identifying the social,

political and economic problems as they affect the great body of her people, namely, the working

class.[197]

Where Carlyle uses the epithet 'the Mechanical Age' to summarise the malady of

modernity in 'Signs', and the 'Sphinx-riddle' of the 'strange new Today' as the controlling

metaphor of *Past and Present*, in *Chartism* 'the condition of the working people […] economical,

moral, in their houses and their hearts, as it is in reality and as they figure it to themselves to be'

is Carlyle's central puzzle.[198] The 'Condition-of-England', then, is the measure by which Carlyle

---

[194]Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 5.
[195] Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.7.
[196] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, p. 181.
[197] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 171.
[198] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 7.

gauges the health of the whole of contemporary society based on (1) the actual material circumstances of the poor in the 'money sense'; (2) the spiritual state of the poor, the significance of which he already made a case for in 'Signs' and will continue to examine in *Past and Present,* and (3) the poor's understanding of *themselves* as a group (or *class*) and their conscious sense of the injustice of their material circumstances.[199] Thus, in Carlyle's writing the functioning of England's institutions is coupled with the metaphor of physical health, such that the system of political economy itself becomes inseparable from the language of disease.

As in the introduction to 'Signs', where he works backwards to diagnose vaticination as a symptom of a society grown too mechanistic, Carlyle opens *Chartism* by first listing the symptoms of the disease: 'Glasgow Thuggery, Chartist torch-meetings, Birmingham riots [and] Swing conflagrations'.[200] These symptoms, evidence of the 'bitter discontent' of the working classes 'grown fierce and mad,' have their origin elsewhere, and it is the project of *Chartism* to identify this source.[201] Thus, it is not the 'chimera' of Chartism itself that is the occasion for Carlyle's pamphlet; indeed, he writes, 'Chartism is a new name for a thing which has had many names [and] which will yet have many', because Chartism, like the French Revolution, the Popish plot and the Salem Witch Trials listed in 'Signs of the Times', is a manifestation of yet another sympathetic frenzy.[202]

First in *Chartism,* and again in *Past and Present* Carlyle finds that it is the prominence of the 'cash-nexus' and the conviction that all social relationships are underpinned by economic self-interest—a concept which had developed out of a linguistic slippage that substituted Enlightenment 'self-love' for mass 'self-interest'—that was the initial corruption.[203] The essence of this denunciation hinges upon the argumentative structure Carlyle developed in 'Signs' where

---

[199] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 71.
[200] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 4.
[201] *Ibid.* p. 4.
[202] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 4.
[203] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 36 and *Past and Present*, p. 185.

contemporary iterations of Enlightenment ideals were proven, by the state of modern society, to be not only unfit for purpose, but the original sin. In the first section of this chapter, I have made much of Ryan Patrick Hanley's suggestion that we might read eighteenth-century Britain's interest in sympathy as an implicit admission that economic activity had the power to diminish traditional social relationships—though it was my argument there that Smith and Hume took pains to demonstrate how the coalescing action of sympathy insulated human relationships from, and rendered them compatible with, the ascendant marketplace. Carlyle's condemnation of the cash-nexus, on the other hand, makes this anxiety explicit and his competing version of the sympathetic spread of emotions makes no such provision for the safety of traditional hierarchies, or humanist attachments. Rather, Carlyle argues that the centralisation of economic activity in society has had profoundly dehumanising and alienating effects:

We call it a Society; and go about professing openly the totallest [sic] separation, isolation. Our life is not mutual helpfulness; but rather cloaked under due laws-of-war, named 'fair competition' and so forth, it is a mutual hostility.[204]

Here, Carlyle critiques the epistemological development of 'society', such that what should signify a mode of 'relation of human beings', has been subsumed by competitive economic structures.[205] Indeed, so corrosive is the 'Gospel of Mammonism' and laissez-faire non-government, that traditional hierarchies cannot even be reasserted.[206] According to Carlyle, 'with the supreme triumph of Cash, a changed time has entered; there must a changed Aristocracy enter', to wit a '*real* Aristocracy' which genuinely governs instead of abdication via laissez-faire.[207]

For some, Carlyle's 'changed aristocracy' has not seemed like much of a change at all. Since he was famously sceptical of democratisation—the many-headed hydra that is the French Revolution, for example, consumes itself in the pursuit of its 'rights'—Carlyle's emphasis on

---

[204] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 185.
[205] *Ibid.* p. 185.
[206] *Ibid.* p. 183.
[207] Carlyle, *Chartism*, pp. 35-6.

hierarchical social arrangements have sometimes been portrayed as regressive.[208]

Notwithstanding this well-documented rejection of democracy, and the repeated configuration of the working class as 'mute', 'dumb' and 'inarticulate', I do want to emphasise the ways in which Carlyle encouraged his readers to think about the lives of working people, especially in their embodied state. In the quote from *Chartism* above, Carlyle's emphasis on the need to understand the condition of the homes and hearts of working people joins together their material reality with their feelings about themselves. So, the question is not, as he shows in the chapter on statistics, what quantity of bread can be had for what quantity of wages, but how such exchanges impact upon the (literal and figurative) heart.[209] Moreover, as John M Ulrich has compellingly shown, Carlyle's argument, here, is less about whether the feelings of the poor are *appropriate* to their circumstances, and more about how material conditions have already produced feelings that the reader must endeavour to understand.[210] And for Carlyle, hunger is the most important bodily experience which impacts upon the heart.

In the *Principle of Population* (1789), Thomas Malthus argued that hunger and disease weren't social problems that had to be eradicated but were rather an index of the extent to which population growth was exceeding food production. He argued that 'unwholesome occupations, severe labour, and exposure to the seasons, extreme poverty, bad nursing of children, large towns, excess of all kinds, the whole train of common diseases and epidemics, wars, plague and famine' were all 'positive checks' to population growth, and thus, natural corollaries to the cycle of population expansion and contraction.[211] Notably, these positive checks are those which disproportionately affect the working class; Malthus accounts for this, indeed builds this disparity into his logic, by arguing that the working class was the most likely to expand during times of

---

[208] Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History,* ed. by John D Rosenberg, (New York: Modern Library, 2002), p. 497.
[209] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 10.
[210] John M Ulrich, 'Carlyle's *Chartism* and the Politics of the (In)articulate', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 45, (2012), 67-87, p. 72.
[211] Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principles of Population*, 8th edn., (London: Reeves and Turner, 1878), p. 8.

feast—economic prosperity and available food, he argued, encouraged improvident marriages and unsustainable, exponential reproduction.[212] The upper classes, by contrast, usually already have access to enough food, so agricultural advancements that increased food availability would have a less significant impact on them. For this reason, hungry and sick working-class bodies were understood by political economists to be a matter of course; they were a representation of both the system at work, and the gross licentiousness that preceded periods of famine.

Carlyle makes it clear, however, that the 'system' is not working, and the proliferation of sick and hungry bodies across his work is indicative of this failure. In *The French Revolution* the hungry body in particular is the seat of unsocial passions. What is interesting about all of this is that Carlyle's passions of the body actually encourage the spread of anger, hatred, resentment etc, in a significant departure from the civilising sympathetic experience theorised by Hume and Smith. In the following examples, I will sketch how hunger is fatally misread by the French aristocracy, so that unanswered cries for food produce the cannibal Revolution. Crucially, though, as above, Carlyle demonstrates that the unsocial passions of the hungry poor are not 'wrong', but the natural expression of prolonged bodily discomfort. Readers are invited throughout *The French Revolution* to feel into, not only physical distress, but uncomfortable emotions as well. For Carlyle, these sympathetic experiences provide an opportunity to redress society's wrongs before the sickness becomes fatal.

Food, access to it, and the radicalising effects of hunger are the central concerns of Book I of *The French Revolution*, 'The Bastille'. There, 'hunger whets everything, especially suspicion and indignation', and queues for bread become sites of consolidation for the poor.[213] The scene where Louis XVI resolves to remove to Metz draws out the contrast between the emotional experiences of hungry bodies, as opposed to those that are well-fed. At Versailles they hold a

---

[212] *Ibid.* p.7.
[213] Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, p. 206.

dinner of welcome in honour of the Regiment de Flandre, for 'dinners are defined as the "ultimate act of communion," men that can have communion in nothing else, can sympathetically eat together, can still rise to some glow of brotherhood over food and wine'.[214] So, 'brotherhood', at least among those who have access to food, is produced during the act of eating communally. But those who have nothing to eat are still banded together by the process of starvation, as the scene immediately preceding shows. There, 'shrill voices from the queues' cry out 'if ye had the hearts of men, ye would take your pikes and secondhand firelocks, […] not leave your wives and daughters to be starved'.[215] While starvation is clearly being invoked as a prompt to the violence that becomes the Revolution, even here, it is being also associated with the heart, and importantly, feeling for other hungry bodies. More significantly, where there is nothing to eat, communal experiences result not in 'brotherhood', but *fraternité*.

However, 'The Bastille' also shows us that it is not only the *act* of starving or eating that joins communities through sympathy, but a consciousness of the body being universal, especially in its vulnerabilities. The 'hungry-food year' births more crowds subsisting only on '"meal-husks and boiled grass" […] howl[ing] angrily, *Food! Food!*'.[216] Marshal Duke de Broglie dispatches soldiers to disperse the growing mob with a show of force and 'whiff of grapeshot', but when the soldiers arrive, they are unable to fire on the bodies they encounter:

Good is grapeshot, Mosseigneurs, on one condition: that the shooter were also made of metal! But unfortunately, he is made of flesh; under his buffs and bandoleers, your hired shooter has instincts, feelings, even a kind of thought. It is his kindred, bone of his bone […] he has brothers in it, a father and mother,—living on meal-husks and boiled grass.[217]

Certainly, the soldiers sympathise with the crowd here. They, not being made of metal, throw down their weapons. That description works in a few ways. The soldiers are not automatons, but

---

[214] *Ibid.* p. 207.
[215] *Ibid.* p. 206.
[216] *Ibid.* p. 143.
[217] *Ibid.* p. 144.

humans, and can't be compelled with complete authority; even as soldiers they have some capacity for self-direction. Neither are the soldiers beyond the realms of feeling, as Carlyle's later construction in *Past and Present* that contrasts hearts of stone with hearts of flesh makes explicit. And this is consistent with how Carlyle has already reimagined the sympathetic sharing of emotion. In 'Signs' as in *Chartism* there is no meaningful disconnect between the mind and the body; in fact, the body is the origin of emotional experience. So, for Carlyle's readers to go some way to answering the 'Sphinx-riddle', it follows that they must first understand the working-class body. However, the most crucial development in Carlylean sympathy is that sympathetic passions in the mind dog physical experience, rather than the other way around. And this impinges upon the last point: that the soldier's bodies are not made of metal, nor are the bodies of the crowd made up of 'meal-husks and boiled grass', but they are all creations of flesh and bone. Moreover, the filial relationships—brothers, fathers, mothers—between the soldiers and the crowd show not only that they are all fleshy and therefore human, but that they are all of *one* flesh. In this passage, then, there is more at work than the soldiers simply pitying the hungry bodies that they see; beyond refusing to fire of them, the soldiers join in with them. Their sympathy with the crowd makes them a part of the crowd. Lastly, this transformation is misunderstood by Broglie, who sees in the soldiers' defiance their transformation into mere 'statues of dragoons', rather that men of flesh and bone.[218]

Finally, I want to finish this chapter by turning to Carlyle's treatment of the one truly universal bodily experience: death. There are many scenes dealing with death throughout *The French Revolution*, but I want to consider the execution of Louis XVI specifically, because Carlyle takes such pains to present it as an ordinary death. This is not to suggest that the significance of the execution and its meaning for the revolution goes unremarked on, but that the greater part of the loss is the death of the man: 'a King dying by such violence appeals impressively to the

---

[218] *Ibid.* p. 146.

imagination […] and yet at bottom it is not the King dying, but the Man! Kingship is a coat; the grand loss is of the skin'.[219] Compare Carlyle's description of this execution, to Smith's imagined hanged man, the 'dancer on the slack rope', that I introduced in the first half of this chapter. Above, I argued that Smith uses the execution to exemplify the operation of sympathy within the mob only, because it was then inconceivable that his bourgeois readers—at their ease—should 'writhe and twist' along with 'the dancer'. I also want to emphasise that Carlyle's execution of Louis is knowingly and conspicuously divested of metaphor; the death is real, as the man was real, as the great loss is real. By the time of Carlyle's writing the fact of the French Revolution had made it possible for bourgeois readers to identify with the executed, who might not be only criminals. But Carlyle's refashioning of the execution is even more far-reaching because it insists on the universality of death. He writes, 'for kings and for beggars, for the justly doomed and the unjustly, it is a hard thing to die,' after which, his command to readers, 'pity them all'.[220] Thus, sympathy is not the reserve of any one class, nor should feeling be confined *within* a class, because, if nothing else, death reveals the real man beneath the imagined coat.

---

[219] *Ibid.* p. 595.
[220] *Ibid.* p. 595.

Sympathy and the Historic Community in Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*

In the General Preface to the 1871 revised collection of his fiction Benjamin Disraeli writes that

it was his original intention to pen just one novel—*Coningsby* (1844)—that would illustrate 'the

derivation and character of political parties; the condition of the People which had been the

consequence of them; [and] the duties of the Church as a main remedial agency in our present

state'.[221] However, in finding these subjects too broad to adequately explore in one novel, he

continued this project in two subsequent novels, *Sybil* (1845) and *Tancred* (1847). This outline of

aims provided by Disraeli has led some critics to pair each novel of the trilogy discretely with one

stated object of exploration, such that *Coningsby* tends to be read as a concentrated history of

political parties, and *Tancred* as a commentary on the operation and shortcomings of the church.

And this linking of Disraeli's stated aims to their realization in fiction has most affected criticism

of *Sybil*, which, in the twenty-first century, has become Disraeli's most-studied novel.[222] This

contemporary popularity is in large part due to its sustained and sympathetic depiction of the

poor that situates it among the Condition-of-England novels, and therefore a perennial feature

of surveys of Victorian literature. Thus, *Sybil* now tends to be read in light of its portrayal of class

antagonisms, the perceived failure of the marriage plot to unite the titular 'Two Nations', and as

a probe into Disraeli's conservative social policy.

The novel is a bildungsroman that tracks the compounded political and moral maturation

of Charles Egremont, the younger brother of Lord Marney, who is persuaded by his mother and

elder brother to 'stand for the old borough' in order to shore up the family's interests during a

period of parliamentary uncertainty.[223] Egremont's unlikely friendship with Walter Gerard, an

overseer at Trafford's Mill, steeps the body of the novel in meditations on the nature of

---

[221] Benjamin Disraeli, 'General Preface', in *Collected Edition of the Novels and Tales*, Vol. 1, (London: Spottiswoode and Co, 1875), p. xii.
[222] Conary, p. 78.
[223] Disraeli, *Sybil,* p. 26.

government, the responsibilities of the church and—Gerard's especial concern—the cause of the

'oppressed' people, of whom Gerard considers himself 'a son'.[224] At first blush Egremont's

eventual marriage to 'daughter of the People' Sybil Gerard, coupled with his political successes,

appears to signal the fulfilment of his potential: his transformation into a member of an

enlightened aristocracy via a sympathetic awakening (Carlyle's influence here is palpable).[225]

However, the revelation that Sybil Gerard is the rightful heir to Mowbray Castle has long

complicated readings of the novel's resolution. Rather than uniting the aristocracy to 'the people'

through affective and legal bonds, the marriage of Egremont to an 'aristocrat in disguise'

undercuts the apparently conciliatory aims of the novel's conclusion and retreats into

prescriptions of a benevolent paternalistic state.[226]

In *Culture and Society* Williams suggests that in the union of Sybil to Egremont we might

read 'not the achievement of One Nation, but […] the uniting properties of Marney and

Mowbray, one agricultural, the other industrial'.[227] For Williams, Disraeli's marriage plot, while

certainly guilty of the same formal failings as *Mary Barton*, *North and South* and *Hard Times*,

successfully forecasts 'what was to become an actual political event', or, the coupling of the

interests of manufacturing with the interests of landownership to the detriment of the non-

moneyed classes.[228] One of the many alternatives to Williams's enduring analysis is Robert

O'Kell's persuasive reading of the marriage plot as an allegorical union between caretakers.

O'Kell writes that we ought not read the marriage of Sybil to Egremont as a failed attempt to

yoke class to class, but rather as the union of aristocratic political power to the politically

disinterested moral guidance of the church.[229] Doing so is predicated on an acknowledgement

that Disraeli does not treat his intended subjects discretely, and instead frames the development

---

[224] *Ibid.* p. 62.
[225] *Ibid.* p. 287.
[226] Bossche, p. 87.
[227] Williams, p. 110.
[228] *Ibid.* p. 110.
[229] Robert O'Kell, 'Two Nations, or One? Disraeli's Allegorical Romance', *Victorian Studies*, 30.2, (1987), 211-34, p. 214.

of contemporary political parties, the condition of the poor, and the responsibilities of the church in concert and context of one another. Moreover, the framing of the above section from the General Preface makes clear Disraeli's conviction that the current condition of the poor is very much the consequence *of* the formation of political parties, as well the primary charge of the church, and therefore central to both contemporary political and religious debate. This conceptual distinction, or rather the recognition of the interconnectivity of the causes, real situation and proposed solutions to the Condition-of-England question is essential to unpacking the novel's conclusions in light of its real scope. O'Kell's argument for the interdependence of the three objectives listed in the General Preface is especially useful because it makes it possible to treat the conclusion of *Sybil* as a comprehensive resolution of the Condition-of-England question as Disraeli imagined it, despite the fact that in it 'the people' play a decidedly secondary role.

The trilogy tends to evoke contemporary industrial life in spirit, as a series of generalizations, rather than as a specific, individualized experience. Of Disraeli's portrayal of industrial life, Williams writes that 'the descriptions of industrial squalor are very like those of Dickens on Coketown: brilliant romantic generalizations—the view from the train, from the hustings, from the printed page—yet often moving, like all far-seeing rhetoric'.[230] While Williams's characterization of the prose as 'moving' almost certainly refers to its stirring qualities, I find that 'moving' also usefully reinforces the mobility implied by his comparison to 'the view from the train'. The tension in this image between an expansive, 'far-seeing' view—another turn of phrase that plays on both actual sight, and idealistic *vision*,—and the necessarily fleeting quality of sketches of industrial society also defines Egremont's sympathetic awakening, which I will discuss in my second section. There, I will demonstrate that the subordination of representations of working-class life to Egremont's sphere of influence is essential to the novel's positioning of

---

[230] Williams, p. 108.

Egremont as an analogue for the implied reader. It also positions his sympathetic awakening as an extension of his physical sight and political ambitions.

But, in comparison to, say, Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novels, Disraeli's depictions of the working class in *Sybil* tend toward stunted caricatures in all but a few cases. Here, the 'condition of the people', which we might mistake for the novel's sole concern, is represented narrowly and usually marked by lack. For example, want of health, nutrition and medical care is illustrated by gruesome descriptions of physical deformity, like that of the girl with 'a back like a grasshopper'; want of both practical education and spiritual guidance is evidenced by the heretical marriage ceremony performed by Bishop Hatton; and the poor's collective want of feeling is demonstrated repeatedly throughout the novel, but particularly during the conflagration at the tommy-shop and again at Mowbray Castle.[231] Even the novel's title seems to be an ironic choice given that Sybil is, at best, a secondary character who functions to bring three men into communion with one another, and their political leanings into relief. Moreover, for the marriage plot to work Sybil must ultimately renounce her support for 'the people' as a viable electorate, just as the novel's climax ultimately discredits the moral position of the Chartists. In the end, Egremont's judgement proves correct: 'the people are not strong; the people can never be strong [...] The new generation of the aristocracy of England are not tyrants [...] Their intelligence, [...] their hearts, are open to the responsibility of their position'.[232] For Disraeli, the ideal state is founded on a version of the *noblesse oblige*, or a positive patriarchal relationship wherein landownership and/or mill-ownership endows the (new) aristocracy with responsibilities to their 'real dependents', or their local community.[233] Disraeli prioritizes a natural hierarchy founded on historical precedent and the responsible exercise of power over the institution of a new and unnatural hierarchy founded on the principles of self-interest and self-aggrandizement that the language of political economy foregrounds.

---

[231] Disraeli, p. 376, p. 167, pp. 379-80.
[232] *Ibid.* p. 276.
[233] *Ibid.* p. 182.

I want to suggest that the limited nature of representations of the working class constrains readerly access to sympathetic identification in its expected form; *Sybil* is less interested in generating simple pity for the poor through realistic depictions of economic disparity, and far more interested in the reader's relationship to Egremont, and to a wider national community. While the novel makes clear Disraeli's conviction that the collective action of the 'new generation' of the aristocracy is necessary for the collective amelioration of the poor, it does so via the sympathetic development of the individual, Charles Egremont, who functions as a projection of the implied reader. Thus, as stated above, attention to the formal processes and language of sympathetic identification is essential to reconciling the apparent inconsistencies in a novel whose focus on the condition of the people is supplanted by advocacy for a strong new aristocracy.

We see in *Sybil* that sympathetic identification *is* the basis of fruitful human relationships, but not necessarily because it prioritizes emotional connections between individuals. Instead, a broader conception of sympathy as a humanist system of self-association with roots in Enlightenment philosophy allows me to demonstrate the workings of sympathy in this novel despite its pitiless descriptions of the poor. As I have argued in the Introduction, the aims of sympathetic identification in the Condition-of-England genre are not generally limited to an unbalanced exchange of middle-class feelings for working-class suffering as Betensky suggests, but rather that sympathy in and with the text facilitates a new kind of social consciousness.[234] Given Disraeli's explicit political goals, it would not be unreasonable to suggest, like Cazamian does, that *Sybil* displays a certain amount of confidence in sympathy's ability to affect both personal and, by extension, institutional change.[235] However, simple caricatures of the poor are clearly not sufficient to achieve this purpose. Rather, the formal exercise required by Smithian sympathetic identification—the process of imagining the other and imagining the self—has, I

---

[234] Betensky, p. 7.
[235] Cazamian, p. 6.

argue, a special significance for this novel and its aims. As it is described by Smith, sympathy is

an active process of self-reflection which appears to prioritize the experiences of the other, at the

same time that it reifies the predispositions of the self.[236] Even so, Smith argues, true sympathy is

disinterested, and socially constructive. Similarly, Disraeli demonstrates Egremont's sympathetic

awakening to be the result of a rigorous internal exercise, and, as the quote above demonstrates,

a developmental process with positive national effects. It is not, however, the result of

Egremont—or the implied reader—imaginatively 'enter[ing] into' the circumstances of the truly

destitute and feeling a mediated version of their feelings.[237]

In this novel sympathetic thinking unites individuals in pursuit of the common good and

is the basis for productive social and political bonds. This is to say that sympathy is a system

through which localized communities form—it is the origin of marital, filial, and neighbourly

ties—as well as the source of a broader national community with far-reaching socio-political

consequences. However, Egremont is only able to achieve this level of sympathetic insight after

he rejects a more limited version of sympathy that confines identification to unproductively

narrow borders. In my first section I will examine the flaws and limits of sympathetic self-

identification as they are presented in the first half of the novel. I want to suggest that while the

novel ultimately looks askance at Morley's 'Two Nations' theory, the speech itself usefully

defines sympathetic identification as a process of self-association realized through perceived

common ground. That this is presented as a precondition of nationhood is critical to the novel's

conclusion, has its basis in Enlightenment moral philosophy and is a productive example of

Andersonian imagined communities.[238]

The problem with Morley and most of the novel's cast is that they then forge

sympathetic connections based largely on material similarities. For example, the novel's

foregrounding of the de Mowbray family history, Lady and Lord Marney's use of Egremont to

---

[236] Smith, p. 18.
[237] Smith, p. 15.
[238] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London, Verso: 1996).

satisfy their own political ambitions, and the many parliamentary squabbles detailed in the novel are all illustrative of a disunited ruling class, who only work together to oppose challenges to their power. Here, the dominance of political economy in public discourse to explain away the condition of the poor signals a breakdown of the natural relationship between the land, its owners and the people. The contemporary unrest of the poor, their disillusion with the leadership of the aristocracy, and the general inability of the government to legislate effectively are all consequences of the loss of the individual's stake in public welfare. It is for this reason that most of the 'old' aristocracy—as opposed to the 'new generation' of which Egremont is a part—is as unavailable to readerly sympathies as the Hell-Cats of Wodgate. In fact, these narrow resemblances are, in the end, shown to be more divisive than beneficial, and the cause of much of the novel's political in-fighting. In such cases the other is limitedly configured as either a tool used to achieve the desires of the self, or as an antagonist to those desires, rather than as a fully-fledged *real* entity. Thus, the novel demonstrates that the pursuit of family and class interest is effectively the pursuit of self-interest by another name, and therefore an unsustainable foundation for meaningful socio-political relationships.

In the second section I will argue that true, or 'complete' sympathy—to use Smith's phrase—entails the recognition of one's place in an historic national narrative, such that Egremont embodies both an idyllic English past and the nation's future potential. It is this self-reflexive recognition that facilitates what I suggest is the most significant relationship in the novel, Egremont's relationship to Walter Gerard, and his perception of Gerard as an (intellectual) equal. For Egremont, thinking sympathetically confers upon the other a special significance because it is predicated by conscious, self-reflexive identification; this means that sympathy occurs when we recognize elements of ourselves in the other. In this section I will argue that in *Sybil* these common qualities need only exist in the mind of the sympathizer, and do not require any actuality. This is particularly useful to note because it helps to overcome the representative limitations of the novel and sheds light on the Victorian belief in the

transformative capacity of sympathy generated through fiction. The issue of novelistic

sympathy's essential fictiveness which I unpack in Chapter One, the idea that sympathy for

fictional persons might somehow displace sympathy for real people, and the notion that

sympathizing with the text precludes tangible action are charges that have long been levelled at

the Condition-of-England novels. But the call-to-action that concludes *Sybil* offers us a more

optimistic interpretation of the power of novels and of sympathetic identification. Because

Disraeli presents sympathy as a recognition of the self in the other, as well as the principle that

governs the socio-political landscape, readerly identification with Egremont confers upon them a

stake in the national narrative. Through Disraeli's model of sympathetic identification, the reader

consciously subscribes to a meaningful role in constructing the future of England. I will

demonstrate the sympathy is the operative background, the wellspring of national identity and

public morality, which have been steadily eroded since religious authority was supplanted by

secular power, and civic responsibility thrown off in favour of personal gratification.

(I) 'Mutual Ignorance': The Problems of Partial Sympathy, Party-lines and Class Interest[239]

One of the advantages of using *Sybil* as a case study of early-Victorian conceptions of sympathy

is that in this novel sympathy as a formal condition of the viewer's relationship to art objects is

invitingly twinned with Disraeli's treatment of sympathy as a binding philosophical principle. I

also want to emphasize Disraeli's frequent and conspicuous use of the word 'sympathy' as

synonymous with both 'mutual comprehension' and to indicate a sense of common purpose that

exists within communities.[240] And like Hume, Smith and Carlyle before him, Disraeli invokes this

understanding of sympathy to make his point about the existence of a natural social order and

the role of institutions in protecting that order. In *Sybil* an experiential gap and restricted lines of

---

[239] Disraeli, p. 290.
[240] *Ibid.* p. 245.

communication divide 'the Privileged' from 'the People' who are otherwise natural allies.[241] In my

second section I will detail how Egremont overcomes this problem of experience, and how this

enables his sympathetic awakening. But first, I will show how Disraeli uses the language of

sympathy to illustrate the dangers of circumscribed community identities. To do so, I will refer

back to arguments made by both David Hume and Adam Smith who emphasize the significance

of 'resemblance', or 'particular similarities in our manners, or character, or country, or language'

to the extension of sympathetic identification.[242]

I will argue that *Sybil* significantly develops this suggestion through a like emphasis on

resemblance and the national character, while also rejecting the exclusivity implied by Smith and

Hume's stressing of 'manner' and decorum which I unpacked in Chapter One. In *Sybil* petty and

superficial resemblances—particularly when it comes to rank, wealth, consequence, and even

temporal political agenda—are all shown to generate only weak sympathetic bonds, when they

generate any at all. Moreover, I will demonstrate how dividing communities along these lines

hinders not only intergroup communication, dislodging traditional relationships between the

wealthy and the working class, but also *intra*group communication, pitting the people (and the

aristocracy) against themselves. While the suggestion that sympathetic attachments between

individuals are limited to those who share material conditions and/ or political opinions is

eventually discredited, I want to suggest that Disraeli shows us communities wherein the

development of sympathetic attachments is so limited as part of his persuasive strategy. Firstly,

because such inclusions demonstrate the foundations of 'mutual ignorance' between the owners

of property and the owners of labour, which for Disraeli is effectively the origin of

contemporary upset. And secondly, to demonstrate that it is a weakness which both the rich and

poor have a propensity toward. Thus, *Sybil*—maybe ironically, given Disraeli's interest in Young

---

[241] *Ibid.* p. 245.
[242] Hume *Human Nature*, p. 318.

England—makes the case that the foundations of truly just state institutions exist in a broader, less materially specific sympathy with a national community, rather than mere party supporters.

(i) An Unworking Aristocracy

Like Carlyle in *Past and Present*, Disraeli implicates the current aristocracy in the Condition-of-England problem. The competition for knowledge between Lady Marney and Lady St Julians, Sir Vavasour's single-minded promotion of the baronets, Lord Marney's domestic tyranny and the de Mowbrays' concealed humble origins all indicate a doctrine of self-interest actively hostile to the formation of sympathetic attachments, even between members of the same class. *Sybil*'s aristocracy deliberately distinguish themselves from one another by rank, ancestry, seat, income and influence. Though, at times, they act as a single body united against the potential alliance between the middle and working classes, for most of the novel these characters divide themselves into a literal hierarchy based on material wealth and historic precedent. It is a practice which reflects and encourages competition by mirroring the ethos of the marketplace, which, Disraeli tells us, actively discourages cooperation. Thus, the 'old' aristocracy in *Sybil* operates as a collection of discrete entities, fostering no real sympathy between them, and, of course, no sympathetic attachments with their 'dependents'.[243]

The word 'sympathy' in its most general sense, denoting support, agreement, approval, and the holding of shared opinions frequently features in descriptions of political activity amongst the novel's nobility. There is, of course, precedent for this somewhat limited conception of sympathy in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (discussed in Chapter One), where Smith writes that experiencing, through the imaginative action of sympathy, the passions of another, indicates both agreement and approval of those passions, and, to 'approve of another man's opinions is to adopt those opinions'.[244] As we see in many of the novel's historical digressions, the language of shared sympathies as it is employed by the aristocracy tends to

---

[243] *Ibid.* p. 182.
[244] Smith, p. 22.

indicate only commonly held political goals, and not affective transference. Indeed, in *Sybil* the rotating cast of aristocratic characters are largely dispassionate—in the emotional sense, if not quite the rational one. In fact, the nobility is characterized by a 'system of exclusive manners and feelings' that literally and figuratively repulses Egremont, driving him temporarily out of England, causing a rift between him and Marney, and making space for his sympathetic identification with Gerard.[245] This subjugation of the affects to political, and often self-interested, goals restricts the development of sympathy as the foundations of personal relationships, as well as the cornerstone of broader social consciousness. Here, I argue that this lack of feeling also restricts the affective possibilities of sympathetic identification with the novel's aristocracy, not only for the novel's poor and for the reader, but even amongst other members of the (fictional) aristocracy.

The simple substitution of sympathy for agreement is certainly what Sir Vavasour has in mind during his campaign to see the baronets included in the House of Lords. Vavasour inflates the political significance of the baronets, arguing that they are 'evidently the body destined to save this country […] Blending all sympathies; the crown, of which they are the particular champions; the nobles of whom they are the popular branch; [and] the people who recognize in them their natural leaders.'[246] As in many of the historical passages of *Sybil,* Disraeli presumes a certain amount of knowledge in the reader; in this case, Vavasour's division of the three bodies of the country and his assumption about their desires is founded primarily on attitudes toward the Great Reform Act (1832) which Disraeli also explored in *Coningsby*. In the earlier novel, the perceived diminished consequence of the House of Lords is the object of Lord Monmouth's vitriol; in *Sybil,* Sir Vavasour chafes against baronets being cast amongst newly elected middle-class MPs in the House of Commons. He reasons that the issue of extending the peerage to include baronets—the only heredity rank excluded from the House of Lords—blends the

---

[245] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 35.
[246] *Ibid*. p. 50.

sympathies of all other ranks. Accordingly, he argues that the gratification of this long-withheld right would be a panacea for the country's divisions by mollifying the people's want of leadership, the nobility's want of parliamentary supremacy, and the monarch's want of support. Despite the novel's ultimate recommendation that a 'real aristocracy' of leaders is needed to 'mould the remedial future', the question of the baronets is demonstrably meaningless.[247] Indeed, Sir Vavasour belies his own claims to political significance, imagining that the baronet's entrance into the House of Lords would be accompanied, not by any further legislative reform, but by a 'magnificent spectacle'.[248]

Critically, Sir Vavasour's absurdist argument divides the nation into three separate political bodies, which are only 'blend[ed]' by the cause of the baronets. Even if we were to take Vavasour seriously, which the novel actively discourages, that through the elevation of the baronets the three bodies would all seek a separate political advantage for themselves proves a deep incompatibility between groups, and Vavasour's failure to understand the real import of sympathy as a unifying process. Accordingly, Vavasour suggests that the baronets could concurrently advocate for a strong monarchy, ensure the dominance of the House of Lords over the Commons, and inspire loyalty and orderliness in the embittered people. The irony is that Sir Vavasour, in being most interested in his own cause, fails to recognize the same sentiment in the other groups. Sir Vavasour's misapprehension of the true sympathies of each group is, of course, lampooned in this description, for none of them are at all interested in the cause of the baronets, even if the restoration of a 'free Monarchy, and a privileged and prosperous People' through a new, young aristocracy were the explicit promises of Disraeli's Young England.[249]

Additionally, Vavasour's three bodies offer a marked contrast to Carlyle's configuration of England as a singular social body, in which the 'condition of the great body of people […] *is*

---

[247] *Ibid.* p. 421.
[248] *Ibid.* p. 50.
[249] *Ibid.* pp. 420-21.

the condition of the country itself' [emphasis added].[250] Carlyle superimposes the condition of

the poor over the nation as a whole to argue that 'the misery of […] the great universal under

class' cannot be 'isolated, and kept apart and peculiar, down in that class'.[251] Rather, 'the misery

of the lowest spreads upwards and upwards till it reaches the very highest'; which is to say, it is

wrong to view the classes as independent entities with competing political objectives as Vavasour

does.[252] As both Carlyle and *Sybil* eventually demonstrate, the needs of 'the Privileged' and 'the

People' are yoked together; however, where Carlyle argues that the misery of the poor rises

upward to contaminate the rich, in the novel, Disraeli shows how the decadence and abdication

of the rich has contributed to the degradation of the poor.

The novel opens in a flurry of activity which evokes the silver-fork style of Disraeli's

earlier work.[253] The richly furnished setting is described in detail, as are the many young,

attractive gamblers who are interested in the horses and 'bored' by virtually everything else.[254]

Charles Egremont is introduced as just one of several hopefuls with a stake in the upcoming

derby, distinguished from the others, at first, by virtue of betting against the winning horse. The

stakes of the derby infuse an amount of drama in the opening scenes; the possible discomfort

and embarrassment in the case of a significant loss do make Egremont 'anxious', but not enough

to hedge and 'mar the symmetry of his winnings'.[255] Thus, the overall impression of the

aristocratic youth in the novel's opening is one of shallow ambitions, vanity and ignoble

speculation with no real stakes.

The dialogue sweeps around those in attendance, eavesdropping on partial conversations

between unintroduced characters, and moving on before they have finished, to overhear another

group and another orator claiming to have the scoop. This mode of delivering snippets of

---

[250] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 5.
[251] *Ibid.* p. 41.
[252] *Ibid.* p. 41.
[253] Sheila Smith, 'Introduction', in *Sybil*, p. ix.
[254] Disraeli, *Sybil*, pp. 2-3.
[255] *Ibid.* p. 7.

conversation illustrates the experience of the speakers, who organize themselves into small groups and unique pockets of gossip, only to suffer from the effects of their partial information. However, the reader has a distinct advantage over the speaking characters by overhearing them all. On one hand, it creates dramatic irony in which the reader knows the truth long before overconfident characters realize it. This is often used to comedic effect, like in the case of the 'joke' made at Lady Firebrace's expense that mocks the apparent gullibility of party 'foxes' Tadpole and Lord Viscount Masque.[256] On the other hand, this advantage also makes he reader complicit in a system where access to privileged information confers power.

The pitfalls of this kind of communication, where partial information is deployed in service of political power, is thematized throughout the novel; it is featured during the dinner scenes at Marney Abbey and Mowbray Castle, in Tadpole and Taper's tilts at parliamentary advantages, and in the letter-writing between Lady Marney and Lady St Julians. In each case the cachet that comes along with private and privileged intelligence increases the circulation of misinformation, at the same time that it inhibits cooperation amongst the elite and consideration for any interests other than selfish ones. For example, in the chapters following the derby, Lady Marney claims to have unrivalled information known only to a few sources: 'the king is dying'.[257] It is this 'greatest of secrets' she uses to persuade Egremont to stand for the borough of Marbury and to see his brother for the first time in two years.[258] The scene plays upon Lady Marney's access to knowledge, punning her 'absolute confidence' as both unquestioning self-assurance, and her discretion with the secret.[259] This discretion, apparently, need not apply when it comes to the realization of family interest though, because Lady Marney recognizes the advantage such information provides. To this end, when Lady Marney's friend, Lady St Julians, sends a note with conflicting information—she writes that the king merely suffers from a recurrence of hay

---

[256] *Ibid.* p. 104.
[257] *Ibid.* p. 26.
[258] *Ibid.* p. 26.
[259] *Ibid.* p. 26.

fever—Lady Marney does nothing to disabuse her of this ignorance. Instead, Lady Marney writes a letter in response that tells Lady St Julians that she is 'always right', while she privately assures Egremont that St Julians 'is always wrong'.[260] The tension between Lady Marney's private information and public gratification of Lady St Julians intensifies the irony of St Julian's confidence; written in 1844, but set in 1837, the novel invites the reader to share Lady Marney's amusement at her friend's expense. We, too, are in a privileged position, and know that the king will die, thus dissolving parliament and presenting Egremont with his chance at a political career. But this scene also demonstrates a tendency amongst the nobility to deploy privileged information strategically and for personal gain. As the accuracy of Lady Marney's presentiment shows, those with the ability to properly manage state secrets can rise in power and prominence.

The nature of this privilege, however, is satirized by Disraeli, particularly in his characterization of the competition between Mr Tadpole and Whig MP Lord Viscount Masque. A 'great stateswoman among the tories [sic.]', Lady Firebrace purposefully cultivates these admirers 'from both sides' of the political divide in order to increase her social consequence.[261] Both Tadpole and Lord Masque are flattered by Lady Firebrace's 'affected enthusiasm' and thus prone to 'indiscretion[s]' that she quickly passes along to her friends.[262] As a result, whenever there is an unforeseen upset in parliament 'the conservative pack that infests clubs, chattering on subjects of which it is impossible they can know anything,' and alerted to the breach by Mr Taper, 'instantly began barking and yelping, denouncing traitors, and wondering how the leaders could be so led by the nose and not see what was flagrant to the whole world'.[263] The characterization of conservative, whig and liberal supporters as 'hounds' bemoaning 'subjects of which it is impossible they can know anything' is doubly ironic. Firstly, because in decrying only what seems obvious in retrospect, they blind themselves to the actual machinations around

---

[260] *Ibid.* p. 28.
[261] *Ibid.* p. 103.
[262] *Ibid.* pp. 103-04.
[263] *Ibid.* pp. 103-04.

them. The 'pack[s]' band together, not only to oppose their political rivals, but also to condemn the ignorance of their own species. Here, the novel demonstrates how the ethos of competition and self-love infects the workings of politics, and relationships amongst the aristocracy. They evidently do not constitute a homogenous group because they have divided themselves into separate packs, are members of different clubs, and have different goals. But more than that, when it appears that their interests have been thwarted, they also turn on their own, 'denouncing traitors' and their party leaders because of a retrospective realization that they had been fooled.

Secondly, the exchange of privileged information is satirical because 'all this time Lord Masque and Tadpole were two old foxes, neither of whom conveyed to Lady Firebrace a single circumstance, but with the wish […] that it should be communicated to his rival'.[264] This comedic revelation recasts the 'great stateswoman', known for her successes in wheedling secrets out of her admirers, as humorously naive. Not only is Lady Firebrace herself taken in by an over-estimation of her political prowess, but Tadpole, knowing he is deliberately feeding her false information, still falls prey to the falsities of Lord Masque, and vice versa. Thus, the attempt at manipulation leaves all quarters open to manipulation themselves, and the confidence each possesses still cannot ensure the advancement of their interests.

In this situation where everyone is equally susceptible to being 'led by the nose', they all miss that which is 'flagrant to the whole world'; not only are they led astray by the false trails of the opposition, but in positioning themselves as fundamentally opposed in the pursuit of exclusive power, they all fail to achieve real power. Consequently, self and party interests are prioritized over the national welfare, and petty politicking prevents meaningful unification between and within parties, as it does between and within classes. Conversations that promise to reveal crucial news about the state of the government rarely allude to actual questions of public policy; rather, all such conversations, though ostensibly concerned with the doings of parliament,

---

[264] *Ibid.* p. 104.

are focused on hedging against the opposition. Thus, these scenes of parliamentary intrigue echo the novel's opening, such that the political jockeying of Tadpole and Lord Masque rehash the contest between Caravan and Phosphorous (the horses), and the conservative, whig and liberal packs are relegated to mere gamblers. This parallel between parliament and sport exposes the banality of the political engagements of the aristocracy; it is just another kind of game where losers can, like Egremont, simply 'forget [their] naughty horse', only to bet again in another arena.[265] If the degraded condition of the people itself is insufficient to demonstrate the failure of the old aristocracy to lead the country, these portraits of decadence, ignorance and selfishness drive the point home.

However, in *Sybil* the failure of the nobility to lead does not imply the equal and opposite success of a political coalition amongst the people. Indeed, Disraeli introduces the fictional district of Wodgate as an apparent foil for the 'old' aristocracy, but with the express purpose of demonstrating that the same weakness for temporal power exists in the people as well as the nobility. Though Wodgate is an industrial centre which has managed to subsist without the administrative interference of any county, it has developed a mode of social organization that reflects that of wider England. Of its ruling class, Disraeli writes,

In the first place, it is a real aristocracy; it is privileged, but it does something for its privileges. It is distinguished from the main body not merely by name. It is the most knowing class at Wodgate; it possesses […] complete knowledge; and imparts in its manner a certain quantity of it in those whom it guides. Thus, it is an aristocracy that leads.[266]

This description serves two purposes. Far from extolling the virtues of fictional Wodgate, the emphasis on its '*real* aristocracy' is at once an allusion to Carlyle's 'aristocracy of talent' and a rebuke against the aristocracy that we have previously met in the novel.[267] Like *Past and Present*, *Sybil* argues that the onus is on the ruling class to live up to their position in the social order

---

[265] *Ibid.* p. 25.
[266] *Ibid.* p. 163.
[267] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 93.

through knowledge (Carlyle calls this 'wisdom') and leadership.[268] However, as the bestial

condition of the people of Wodgate attests, this aristocracy is not one to be emulated. Rather, in

spite of its apparent divergence from wider England, Wodgate functions as a microcosm of the

country, in which Disraeli's positioning of the condition of the people as the miserable product

of institutional failure is taken to its logical extreme.

In Wodgate there are 'no others […] to preach or to control', 'there were no public

buildings of any sort; no churches, chapels, town-hall, institute, [or] theatre'.[269] As a result the

people are not merely immoral, 'for immorality implies some forethought; or ignorant, for

ignorance is relative; but they are animals; their minds blank; and their worst actions only the

impulse of a gross or savage instinct'.[270] Thus, it is not the unbounded leadership of a Wodgatian

aristocracy that can ameliorate the condition of the people, all-knowing as it may be. In fact,

aristocratic leadership in a vacuum of other institutions, particularly arms of the nation-state and

church, results in tyranny and relentless deterioration, such that the Wodgatians are not citizens,

or subjects, or even human. Wodgate even resists the expansive influence of political economy

and the 'interference or influence of capital is instantly resisted'; thus, its numerous apprentices

(Wodgate's 'People') are divested of even this limited means of self-distinction and independence

and are rendered slaves to the will of their 'master workmen'.[271]

However, I want to suggest that we ought not read Wodgate's 'real aristocracy' of

workmen as an endorsement of wider England's property-owning aristocracy simply because the

latter's failings seem to be less egregious. Especially not when Wodgate's very existence is

dependent upon the failures of the 'other' aristocracy, state administrative bodies, and the

Church to act as 'the main remedial agency [in the] present state'.[272] For example, shocking as

Tummas and Sue's perversion of even the most basic tenets of Christian doctrine may be—Sue

---

[268] *Ibid.* p. 93.
[269] *Ibid.* p. 164.
[270] *Ibid.* p. 164.
[271] *Ibid.* p. 163.
[272] Disraeli, 'General Preface', p. xii.

has educated him about 'our Lord and Saviour Pontius Pilate, who was crucified to save our sins;

and in Moses, Goliath, and the rest of the apostles'—it is not the state of their immortal souls

that this novel is most concerned with.[273] Rather, as I will discuss in more detail in the following

section, the novel indicts the landed aristocracy for creating the conditions where such

perversions can flourish. If, as O'Kell argues, Disraeli's recommended solution to the Condition-

of-England question is a marriage of aristocratic power to religious ministrations, neither

Wodgate nor the 'other' aristocracy fulfil that requirement.

My final point about Wodgate is one which I have already alluded to in the introduction

to this chapter: that the novel's depictions of the Wodgatians are not intended to cultivate the

sympathetic identification of readers, that is to say, the Wodgatians are not sympathetic objects.

In *Scenes of Sympathy* (2000) Jaffe takes Smith's formulation of the sufferer/ sympathizer dynamic

of sympathetic identification to be emblematic of Victorian representations of middle-class

precarity. She writes, 'the "objects" of Victorian sympathy are inseparable from Victorian

middle-class self-representation precisely because they embody, to a middle-class spectator, his

or her own potential narrative of social decline: they capture the fragility of respectable

identities'.[274] For Jaffe, sympathizing with and through novelistic representations constitutes a

'threat' to readerly equilibrium because doing so involves a recognition of the transitory nature of

one's material circumstances. While this is certainly consistent with Carlyle's assertion about

misery's contagious aspect quoted above, it is also dependent upon a recognition of the self in

the other which the descriptions of Sue and Tummas do not invite or achieve. Their physical and

spiritual deformities, rather, repel the reader from too close a 'self-representation' since to be

reduced to such a primordial state is an inconceivable consequence of either sudden economic

deprivation or political upheaval. While Sue and Tummas might be objects of pity—though, I

think their grotesquery renders them mere sideshows to the novel's real dramas—they do not

---

[273] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 167.
[274] Jaffe, p. 9.

'hail' the reader as Jaffe suggests sympathetic objects ought.[275] Indeed, Sue's myopic gaze means that she does not 'look back' at the reader, and circumvents the reciprocity Jaffe identifies as sympathy's threat by constituting the reader as not only a feeling subject, but an object of the other's gaze.[276]

The upshot of Sue's description of Tummas's spiritual education is that there are too many layers of separation between the reader's affective comfort and the Wodgatians degradation for the portrait to upset readerly equilibrium. The chief constraint to sympathy is that Tummas and Sue are unconscious of their own degradation. Moreover, their animalism means that they are not representative of that 'last stage of human wretchedness', 'the loss of reason', because they could never have been endowed with that capacity unique to mankind.[277] This is key because it means that any imaginative entrance into their circumstances in the Smithian fashion would necessarily disrupt the development of sympathy as a concordance of feeling. Indeed, Tummas and Sue exhibit no passions with which to feel along (or, to feel against in the case of the unsocial passions). They express no visible passions which might infect the middle-class reader of the scene, and in their animal state they do not even express the bodily passions which might give rise to secondary feelings of distress in the observer. Rather Morley's reaction to the pair is the sarcastic lamentation, "'could they not spare one Missionary from Tahiti for their fellow countryman at Wodgate!'".[278]

Here, it is precisely Morley's unfeeling response to Tummas and Sue that I am interested in, because, I think, it is usefully illustrative of how narrative distance from the working class works to discourage genuine sympathy (as a vehicle of the emotions) in that direction. Morley's presence on the scene adds another layer to the critical distance with which the novel views the working class. Morley himself is incapable of feeling with or for the Wodgatians. He, like the

---

[275] *Ibid.* p. 6.
[276] *Ibid.* p. 7.
[277] Smith, *The Moral Sentiments*, pp. 16-17.
[278] Disraeli, p. 167.

decadent aristocracy, is more interested in using his influential position over them to realize his political goals. That Morley's characterization also discourages sympathetic identification with *him*—especially after the threatening nature of his proposal to Sybil and his collusion with Bishop Hatton is revealed—further separates the reader from self-association with the representation.

However, it is important to say that I don't think that the novel's lack of sympathy for Tummas and Sue necessarily indicates a failure in the novel's capacity for representation. In fact, I want to suggest that realistic representations of either the very rich or the very poor in *Sybil* are only ancillary to the kinds of representations that the novel is really invested in. Looking to the novel's concluding passages in which Disraeli contrasts his 'light and unpretending' form with 'considerations of the very opposite character' makes this evident.[279] *Sybil* is not a narrative in which simply feeling for, or even with, the poor is sufficient to 'cure' the 'suffering of millions'; it is, as the last pages demonstrate, a work designed to persuade readers 'to seek in a right understanding of the history of their country and in the energies of heroic youth, the elements of the national welfare'.[280] It is a call to action that not only supports the principles of Young England—a short-lived fringe of the Tories that advocated for a strong monarchy and nobility while also pushing for more social reforms to benefit the poor—but, hails the reader as an English subject. The meaning of 'subject' here is layered; I am referring to Althusser's 'agent of practice', and 'social subject', as well as the subject as citizen.[281] This is to say that the novel is not interested in Tummas and Sue because they are not subjects; obviously they are not political, voting subjects (and Egremont's aforementioned speech illustrates why that ought to be the case), but neither do they hail the reader, endowing them with Ablow's 'quasi-real hallucinatory individuality'.[282]

---

[279] *Ibid.* p. 420.
[280] *Ibid.* pp. 420-22.
[281] Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self- Criticism*, (London, New Left: 1976), p. 95.
[282] Ablow, p. 299.

(II) Sympathetic 'Thinking the Nation'; National Identity as a Product of Communal Feeling

One of the most powerful moments in *Sybil*—certainly the one that has most interested literary criticism since its publication—is the 'Two Nations' speech. This concept, when introduced by the Owenite Stephen Morley, Egremont's sexual rival, suggests that the significant material differences in the lives of the rich and poor divide them so completely that it is as if they reside in different countries. In the scene at Marney Abbey where Egremont first meets the Gerards, Morley gives the speech that introduces this idea and provides the novel's subtitle:

Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws […] THE RICH AND THE POOR.[283]

The significance of Morley's pronouncement is simultaneously affirmed and undercut by Sybil's dramatic entrance onto the scene in 'a sudden flash of rosy light' and song.[284] On one hand, the entrance is a distraction that prevents any further elaboration, or contradiction of Morley's point by moving the gaze of the novel away from it. On the other hand, the use of capital letters for emphasis, sudden entrance of Sybil, and abrupt end to the chapter all work together to underscore this argument. Indeed, while it quickly becomes clear that the Gerards also subscribe to this view, the political discussions at Mowbray Castle seem to indirectly affirm the deep division between the rich and poor as well. Accordingly, Morley's pronouncement, at least in the first instance, is characterized as true, and it is not until much later that Egremont meaningfully challenges the Two Nations theory.

[283] *Ibid.* pp. 65-66.
[284] Disraeli, p. 66.

As Patrick Brantlinger has pointed out, the concept of the Two Nations is ultimately discredited by the novel and demonstrated to be a dangerous notion at that.[285] O'Kell suggests that it is introduced as 'a foil for Disraeli's main thesis' which, as I outlined above, positions the marriage of Sybil and Egremont not as reuniting the Two Nations, but as the apotheosis of the paternal state.[286] However, I want to suggest that though Egremont eventually rights Sybil's prejudices and transforms into a mouthpiece for Young England, it is important to read Morley's speech as it is presented. Firstly, because it is a formative moment for Egremont that first reveals to him the thoughts, feelings and 'condition of the people' as 'a subject of which he knew nothing' until this point.[287] Secondly, because Morley's outline of the causes of the disjunction between rich and poor are actually upheld by the novel; disparity in lived experience and bypassed communication *are* established as the origin of mutual ignorance between the classes. And finally, Morley's Two Nations speech is useful because his framing of nationality as singular product of communal experience and cohesion is reappropriated by Egremont and provides the terms through which the novel resolves the Condition-of-England question.

So, in turning to the Two Nations speech, I want to start off by looking at how the novel reveals 'the condition of the working people […] economical, moral, in their houses and their hearts, as it is in reality and as they figure it to themselves to be'.[288] In the last chapter I used this quote from *Chartism* to make the suggestion that the people's understanding of themselves was as (if not more) important to developing a right understanding of the Condition-of-England question as was an accurate accounting of their physical circumstances. In *Chartism* this is made obvious by Carlyle's dismissal of statistical analyses in reckoning quality of life. In *Sybil* the developing consciousness of the poor is, again, more significant than an accurate representation of their condition, as the novel's elision of realistic detail makes plain; but, this is only because

---

[285] Patrick Brantlinger, *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832-1867*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press: 1977), p. 97.
[286] O'Kell, p. 216.
[287] Disrael, p. 47.
[288] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 7.

understanding how the poor think about themselves allows Egremont to challenge their

conclusions more effectively and position himself as a sympathetic object.

However, in the scene at Marney Abbey where Egremont's first encounter with the

working class takes place, his initial ignorance of the condition of the people is implicated in its

cause. At the end of the speech, we might read the 'sudden flash of rosy light' that accompanies

Sybil as an instance of pathetic fallacy, wherein the bright and musical entrance of a woman

breaks through the dimness and obfuscation of masculine political disagreement, signalling the

potential pacification her character offers. This would seem to uphold the idea that the marriage

plot works toward some amelioration of the condition of the people; Sybil's is a warming,

reassuring entrance when contrasted against the argumentative tone of Morley's speech.

Conversely, we might read the flash of light, like the printed capitals, as literally highlighting

Morley's final line. To do so is to suggest that this scene induces a moment of enlightenment for

Egremont where his ignorance of the real condition of the people and their attitude toward

traditional authority—Morley's speech is prompted by Egremont's reference to the Queen—is

revealed. It is a trope capitalized on by the gothic genre, wherein a sudden flash of light(ning)

frequently portends the realization of the horrible, inescapable truth. Shelley, for example, makes

use of this metaphor in *Frankenstein* (1818) when Victor searches through the mountains for the

murderer of his brother William and finds the monster revealed in the storm:

A flash of sudden lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy dæmon [sic.] to whom I had given life […] Could he be (I shuddered at the conception) the murderer of my brother?[289]

Of course, the real import of the discovery is not directly acknowledged by Victor in this scene.

While the flash of lightning illuminates the monster/ murderer to him, Victor's subsequent

pursuit distracts from the real meaning of the discovery implied in the narration. Here, the

---

[289] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, (London, Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor and Jones: 1818), p. 147.

terrible truth that eludes Victor is that he bears ultimate responsibility for William's murder because it was committed by 'the wretch […] to whom [he] had given life'. I want to read Morley's speech through the lens of *Frankenstein* here because, as I have reasoned above, at this stage in the novel Morley's argument is revelatory rather than deceitful. Thus, the terrible truth Egremont must confront is not only the deep division between the Two Nations, but also the possibility that that the 'filthy' 'wretch[es]' burning ricks at Marney Abbey have been 'given life' by the hubris and disavowal of the aristocracy.

I want to make a further suggestion that reading the poor in *Sybil* alongside the Creature in *Frankenstein* can help to unpack the (un)sympathetic relationship between the self and the monstrous other in Disraeli's novel. Indeed, *Sybil*'s poor, especially those in Wodgate are very like *Frankenstein*'s Creature: both are the products of hubristic, unfeeling creators that have disavowed their creations for their ugliness and deformity, which is itself a result of the creators' neglect; and, both live in ignorance, struggling vainly for a coherent selfhood denied them by a society that also will not accept them as they are. The Creature manifests a physical and moral ugliness that disgusts and repulses Victor, but which only reifies the Creature's moral degradation. This disgust, I argue is reproduced by the physical and moral conditions of the Wodgatians, such that they are not sympathetic objects, as I have suggested above. Indeed, Sianne Ngai's work on disgust has shown that 'disgust explicitly blocks the path of sympathy in Adam Smith's theory of moral sentiments,' in part, at least, because 'disgust is never prone to producing […] confusions between subject and object'.[290] As I will demonstrate in the following pages, material circumstances, resemblance and self-projection *into* the other—all part of the sympathetic process at work—provide the critical framework through which the Two Nations resolve into One.

---

[290] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings,* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 335.

Morley's speech frames the forging of sympathetic attachments as the direct result of both communication and shared experiences; the literal differences in lived experience between the rich and poor amounts to an 'insurmountable' figurative distance from one another and stunts the development of sympathetic bonds between them.[291] Here, Morley lists breeding, food, manners and laws as the foundation of what he proposes are entirely distinct national characters, effectively framing nationhood as a construct of (recognised) commonality. In order to fully digest the value of these categories, I will turn briefly back to Hume's *Human Nature* and Smith's *Moral Sentiments*. The sum of their work presents sympathy as both a process which manufactures national consciousness and, paradoxically, is a *product* of that national consciousness. This is significant because, despite the novel's (and Sybil the character's) rejection of Morley, 'think[ing] the nation' through sympathetic self-association is key to Disraeli's thesis.[292]

In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) David Hume writes that 'resemblance and contiguity' are necessary for the sympathetic transmission of passions, because the more that the object resembles the self, the more 'vivacity' their expressions have; or, perceived resemblance in the mind of the sympathizer constitutes the other (and their feelings) as real.[293] More to the point, Hume gives several examples of what generates resemblance, writing, 'where […] there is any peculiar similarity in our manners, or character, or country, or language, it facilitates the sympathy. The stronger the relation is betwixt ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition'.[294] It is not insignificant, then, that Morley's list of differences between the classes echoes that of Hume's national differences, and has the double effect of illustrating those resemblances which create sympathy amongst the people, at the same time that it justifies their deep division from the rich.

---

[291] *Ibid.* p. 276.
[292] Anderson, p. 22.
[293] Hume, *Human Nature*, p. 317.
[294] *Ibid.* p. 318.

But, according to Hume, it is not just that resemblances in the national character beget sympathetic bonds, but that the propensity toward sympathy also creates further resemblances. He writes, 'the great uniformity we observe in the humours and turn of thinking in those of the same nation […] arises from sympathy [more] than from any influence of the soil and climate'.[295] Thus, the fabric of national identity is woven not only from objects and customs, but from sympathy itself. Further, Hume writes that 'sympathy with persons remote from us [is] much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous.[296] This is a significant modification given the distance implied by Morley's characterization of the relations between rich and poor, in particular, the metaphor of 'different planets' indicates the remoteness that economic inequalities have wrought. Organizing the national body according to economic value reifies the stratification of society, and precludes the formation of sympathetic bonds *between* classes. This is precedented in the *Moral Sentiments* where Smith further develops the idea that nationalism limits the extension of sympathy beyond borders. There, Smith writes, 'the love of our own country seems not to be derived from the love of mankind,' for the great degree of 'prejudices and hatreds' between contiguous, but independent, nations demonstrates that national sympathies do not translate into transnational, or generic sympathy.[297] Therefore, national (or, in Morley's frame, class) sympathy paradoxically creates animosity for neighbouring nations/ classes, and the initial inhibition of transnational sympathy negatively reproduces itself.

While Morley's Two Nations theory is critically undercut by the novel's conclusions, I argue that this is not because he fails to understand the mutually reinforcing relationship between sympathy and the national identity. Rather, the problem with Morley's frame is that he regards the rich and poor as Two Nations in competition with one another, rather than as Egremont comes to see them: mutual benefactors of England's great national tradition.

---

[295] *Ibid.* pp. 316-17.
[296] David Hume, *Principles of Morals*, p. 99.
[297] Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, pp. 271-72.

(i) National Self-Fashioning, a Problem of Degrees

Sybil does not, I think, suggest that the Condition-of-England problem arises because the importance of nationhood is missed out by the novel's other characters; it isn't. Rather, the problem stems from self-identification with an incomplete, or worse, fabricated national narrative. This, according to *Sybil*, disrupts the development of natural sympathies that ought to emanate from contiguity because it installs a greater figurative distance between the nation as a product of a communal historical narrative and the nation as personal saga.

One example of this is the strategic recitation of aristocratic family histories as a means of linking family privileges to nationally significant events. This is not problematic in and of itself, because the novel is genuinely invested in the continuity between the English past and English present. Walter Gerard even boasts of his 'English blood' and recalls an ancestor who 'drew a bow at Azincourt [sic.]'.[298] And, as I will show further on, Gerard's self-association with a common English past does end up being a generative moment in Egremont's sympathetic journey, because it is properly positioned by Gerard as *communal* property. Whereas, for the majority of the novel's characters, personal connections to the past are deployed as a measure of their access to power. The novel's wealthy rewrite the national narrative in service of their self-importance, while the novel's poor disassociate themselves from England altogether.

For instance, Lady Maud Fitz-Warene makes claims to her family's role in the production of England and English national culture when she laments the ruined state of Marney Abbey: 'I am surprised old families can be so dead to our national art; so full of our ancestors, their exploits, their mind'.[299] As a part of her speech on the subject Lady Maud invokes 'our ancestors' and their 'great exploits,' as well as her family connection to the crusades as a display of cultural capital that also works to justify her social position. Of course, the reader already knows that it is

---

[298] Disraeli, p. 174.
[299] *Ibid.* p. 105.

unlikely that she has any ancestors interred in the monastic ruins because Maud's social position does not, in fact, derive from historical precedent, but from the unsavoury character and prudent investments of her grandfather. Furthermore, the Abbey, its history and any monuments to ancestors actually interred there is 'diminished yearly' by Marney's indifference.[300] The 'national art' that Maud praises, emblematic of England's prosperous history, is now a ruin emblematic of England's impoverished present. Significantly, *Sybil* presents the current state of both the Abbey and of wider England as the results of aristocratic neglect.

In tracing the lineage of the Greymounts, progenitors of the Marneys, the reader is reminded that the monarch, in an effort to assert secular authority and repay services rendered after the disillusion, granted the lands and rents of formerly religious grounds to their Norman supporters. The name-change of the lowly-sounding Greymount to the more aristocratic—and French—sounding Egremont is just one expression of the newly minted aristocracy's preoccupation with manufacturing concrete links to the past. The same is true in the case of the Fitz-Warenes. In fact, Lord Fitz-Warene actively obscures his family lineage by having Baptist Hatton produce his pedigree. Though the club waiter John Warren was able to secure his position, at first through his capabilities as an employee, and secondly through dubious record-keeping, the Lord Fitz-Warene disavows his relationship to labour entirely. By denying his own history, particularly as it relates to work, in favour of a manufactured pedigree, Fitz-Warene is the embodiment of the problems with this kind of national self-fashioning; tenable relations to the historic past are bypassed, while the devaluation of work is met with the exultation of invented (and exclusive) stories.

As in the preceding section, the novel's aristocracy are not the only ones prone to a style of self-fashioning that *Sybil* ultimately rejects. One of the novel's major digressions that deals with this issue falls within the cottage of Warner, the dispossessed hand-loom weaver. Soon after

---

[300] *Ibid.* p. 105.

his first meeting with the Gerards, Egremont is introduced to Mr St Lys, the vicar of Mowbray, who takes Egremont along on a ministering visit to Warner's home. There they encounter Sybil, sent by the Mother Superior on the same mission. But before any of the interventionists arrive, the novel introduces Warner's domestic circumstances and his ailing wife—we have already met his daughter Harriet, who has foolishly left Trafford's Mill for greener pastures. The weaver himself is introduced by way of a short speech he gives while sat at his loom:

If a society that has been created by labour suddenly becomes independent of it, that society is bound to maintain the race whose only property is labour, out of the proceeds of that other property, which has not ceased to be productive. When the class of the Nobility were supplanted in France, they did not amount in number to us hand-loom weavers; yet all Europe went to avenge their wrongs […] Who cares for us? Yet we have lost our estates. Who raises a voice for us? Yet we are as innocent as the nobility of France. We sink amongst no sighs except our own. And if they give us sympathy, what then? Sympathy is the solace of the Poor; but for the Rich there is compensation.[301]

Though none of our heroes have yet entered the scene, Warner's soliloquy, included for the reader's benefit, provides a marked contrast to the industrial labourers Morley encounters at Wodgate.

The widespread adoption of machinery that could produce textiles at lowered costs, and the relegation of skilled weavers to less-profitable 'piece-work' provides the impetus for these meditations, and Ricardian political economy provides the language that shapes Warner's lament. For the purposes of this speech, the most notable principle of Victorian political economy is that all economic activity can be reduced to an exchange of property. In the case of the working class, their only property is their labour, while capital (and the access to the means of production it provides) is the property of the employing class. This exchange culminates in wages for labourers and the products of labour for the capitalists—wages, Mill defines as 'the means by which the capitalist procures to himself, in the way of purchase, the use of that labour in which the power

---

of production really resides'.[302] In the shift toward mechanisation and the usurpation of weavers, Warner marks the deteriorating relationship between the owners of labour and the owners of capital, and mounts a cogent argument for a system of national welfare for the maintenance of those who have been supplanted supplied from the profits of that 'which had not ceased to be productive,' (i.e. land). That this speech might demonstrate an incredible facility with the central concepts of political economy is not remarked upon. Nor is his more nuanced representation of profitability as a result of economic activity which is not necessarily jointly experienced by the owners of capital and the owners of labour. In fact, Warner's appropriation of the language of political economy to illuminate the deficiencies of that system also exposes the flaws in Marney's unfeeling administration of Malthusian 'positive checks' to population growth detailed in the chapter that precedes this scene.[303] During dinner Marney tells Lord Mowbray that he is doing his part to encourage emigration by destroying cottages at every opportunity. That he is effectively destroying his own property and as a result limiting the productivity of his estate does not seem to occur to him, nor does it reflect particularly well on the capitalists' understanding of the system that upholds their wealth.

But Warner's argument about the necessity of a system of public welfare is not limited to economic theory. He continues his speech by comparing the dispossession of hand-loom weavers to the overthrown of the French nobility. However, in making this comparison Warner does not use the language of material rights that the Hell-Cats adopt during the riot. Rather than aligning himself with 'the people' and the demands of the republic, which ought to be the more likely comparison, in claiming his labour as his property, Warner too, becomes a symbol for the effects of dispossession that *Sybil* thematizes.

Indeed, Disraeli lifts many of his descriptions of the riot and the demands of the Hell-Cats directly from Carlyle's work in *The French Revolution*, which itself informed Carlyle's later

---

[302] Mill, 'On Profits and Interest', in *Unsettled Questions,* p. 91.
[303] Thomas Malthus, p. 8.

depictions of Chartism. What I did not explore in the chapter on Carlyle is the other significant account of the French Revolution in the British consciousness, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). There are some similarities between these two anglo-versions of the French Revolution; both thinkers exhibit scepticism toward the universal rights of man and the false abstractions of the Enlightenment. Burke also advocated for the centrality of private property and the legacy to the power of the state. This is worth noting because private property, the administration of just laws and the animation of the public spirit, which Burke sees as lacking in the new French system, are all drawn from Hume's conception of social organization that is predicated on the belief in man's natural sympathy.[304] It is also worth mentioning Burke because his formulations intersect, sometimes significantly, with Disraeli's narrative asides; for example, Burke criticises the revolution on the grounds that it will not produce 'a free constitution, a potent monarchy, a disciplined army, a reformed and venerated clergy,—a mitigated, but spirited nobility,' 'a liberal order of commons,' or 'a satisfied, laborious and obedient people'.[305] This clearly dovetails with the aims of Young England that Disraeli puts forward at the novel's end. Moreover, Disraeli invokes the spectre of the French Revolution at once as a caution against domestic insurrection, and as a means of reasserting typical English values. The invocation of the French Revolution also serves as a warning to the English aristocracy against their own corruption and depravity, a warning that seems to take its cue from Carlyle's vision of violent revolution as the inevitable product of aristocratic excess and inhumanity.

Though, as Warner notes, Britain along with other European nations harboured members of the French aristocracy following the confiscation of *émigrés'* property, in many other respects, England actively distanced itself from the extremities of the Revolution. In *Sybil* the combination of the poor into unions, or associations promoting their 'rights', is shown to be, not only against their interests, but against the interest of the country as a whole. Still, the

---

[304] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol 3, (London: John C Nimmo, 1883), p. 298.
[305] *Ibid.* p. 279.

revolutionary threat materialises on fictional English soil and culminates in the siege of Mowbray

Castle. The Hell-Cats, with their assertion of the 'rights of labour' execute an ill-fated assault on

private property, that ends in yet another fire; Mowbray Castle is inadvertently burned to the

ground by Chartist torches, and becomes a 'sumptuous' funeral pyre for the 'ruthless savage,'

Bishop Hatton, 'who presumed to style himself the Liberator of the People'.[306]

But Warner does not associate himself or his impoverished conditions with the French

poor, and the consciousness of being stripped of his birth-right is more significant to his self-

identity than any simple identification based around class. The significance of this move is

twofold. Firstly, Warner distances himself from the spectre of the mob, instead, making a logical

and dispassionate argument for a system of public welfare. Secondly, he rejects the logic of

individual responsibility found in debates about the poor's real conditions, so that the condition

of the working classes is not attributed to a lack of moral fortitude or financial planning, but as

the result of failed economic policies.

Finally, Warner ends his musings by explicitly contrasting sympathy that comes from the

rich, with compensation that does not come at all. In this limited view sympathy is offered to the

poor in lieu of offering anything of value, but I argue Warner's view of sympathy is almost

immediately weakened. It seems he is ironically unconscious of the sympathetic process of self-

association that enables his identification with the French nobility. And while Warner's speech is

a useful means of articulating the oversights produced by strict adherence to political economy,

his international imagination, certainly preferable to Maud's example, distracts from the national

narrative Warner is actually a part of. More than that, when Sybil enters the scene bringing bread

and tea by way of relief, she accepts Mrs Warner's thanks by saying 'who should sympathise with

the poor but the poor?'.[307] Eventually, Sybil does come to realise who exactly can sympathise

with the poor, but not be poor themselves, but until then, her stunted sympathies and 'national'

---

[306] Disraeli, p. 416.
[307] *Ibid.* p. 121.

pride—limited as it is to one class—is a function of the 'mutual ignorance' that the novel attempts to overcome.

(III) Who Should Sympathise with the Past but the Present?

It is clear that Disraeli uses the novel to galvanize support for Young England. As such, the sympathetic depiction of Egremont's interiority is designed to inspire a parallel realization in the reader. Egremont is the consistent locus for reader sympathy throughout the novel, and it is because of this closeness that we should read the sympathetic development of Egremont as the sympathetic development of the reader. One way to read the sympathetic identification of readers with 'good' characters is to use Smith's illustration of the generous spectator from the *Moral Sentiments.* Here, the desire to associate one's self with the admirable traits of the other illuminates the process by which novel protagonists like Charles Egremont and Margaret Hale are positioned as vehicles of benevolent and pleasurable feelings. In my fourth chapter, I will explore why Margaret Hale's benevolence dispenses with readerly performance of generosity, but as I have suggested above, *Sybil* is invested in the process that transforms sympathetic feelings into meaningful action. In this section I will explore Egremont's sympathetic awakening as a condition of his participation in a national narrative that is not bounded by exclusive class interests, but instead generated through an imaginary relationship to Gerard, and through the marriage plot that concretises that relationship.

The novel's concluding pages tell us how to read what precedes them, where the final passages tell readers to 'seek' a resolution to the nation's divisions through 'a right understanding of the history of their nation'. Thus, *Sybil* shows us that sympathy is not only or always a function of the emotions, but a logical extension of 'right understanding'. Turning again to the novel's concluding passages demonstrates the significance of the national historical narrative that the novel posits, especially the notion that 'the past alone can explain the present, and it is youth

alone that can mould the remedial future'.[308] In *Imagined Communities* (1983) Benedict Anderson

suggests that nationhood is a relatively modern concept, enabled, among other key technological

and economic developments, by secular 'print-languages', the primary vehicles of which are

novels and newspapers.[309] For now, I am most interested in what Anderson says about the

nation as an imagined entity, 'always loom[ing] out of an immemorial past, and still more

important, glid[ing] into a limitless future'.[310] I want to suggest that Disraeli frames his vision of

the future of England as a continuation of a common English past that has been wrongfully

diverted. What is important here is that Disraeli is not advocating for a 'return' to the past, as

Zlotnick's positioning of his argument seems to suggest. Rather, the harnessing of the energies

of youth join the humane institutions of the past to the progress of the future. It is worth

pointing out that this would not have seemed contradictory to Disraeli, who was in awe of the

technological developments of modernity, which is made obvious in the description of

Manchester in *Coningsby* and in that of Trafford's model mill in *Sybil*.[311] In fact, Trafford's mill is

constituted as the ideal merger of the progressive with the traditional and is effectively a modern

monastery.

(i) Walter Gerard and the English Past

During their first meeting in the ruins of Marney Abbey, Gerard presents the monastery

as the ideal model of pre-industrial socio-political organization, because such institutions

represented the unification of the governing power structure with unimpeachable moral

precepts, which had the knock-on effect of reinforcing the supremacy of the public good.

Gerard's argument rests on the supposition that 'somebody […] must own the land', and that the

---

[308] Disraeli, p. 421.
[309] Anderson, p. 45.
[310] *Ibid.* p. 12.
[311] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 154.

monastics were preferable to modern landlords because subservience to god would necessarily preclude self-interest.[312] He tells Egremont, 'the monastics could possess no private property; they could save no money; they could bequeath nothing. They lived, received, expended in common. The monastery, too, was a proprietor that never died and never wasted'.[313] This formulation humanizes the body of the monastery by construing it not as a single entity, but a collective whose relations were maintained by labour: the peasantry laboured on the monastery's land, and as reimbursement the monks performed spiritual and charitable labours to maintain the integrity of the people.

In this conception is the parallel formulation of the monastery as a structure that 'never died and never wasted', where both death and waste have a double meaning. In the first place, Gerard locates the power and benevolence of the monastery in its eternal life; death has neither a private, not public impact on its structure. The abbey itself was not the private property of the monks but held in common between them and the people who it supported and who supported it in symbiosis. According to Gerard, the monks amassed no personal wealth, nor consequence through the labour of the people; they could not save, nor bequeath anything. As a result, there was no inherent value in the accumulation of land and material goods. Even as old monks died and new ones came to the abbey, the eternal monastery might continue unchanged by her inmates. Additionally, the monastery was a body that never 'wasted', where waste figures as both careless, extravagant expenditure to no purpose (we already know the novel's aristocracy has a propensity toward this vice) and the atrophying of strength. Thus, the monastery figures as both the ever-living flesh of its spiritual raison d'etre and as an ever-renewing paterfamilias, ensuring both the spiritual and secular condition of the people. Taking Gerard's view, the stability and security that such bodies offered ensured loyalty among the peasantry, because they were conscious that their labour upheld not only themselves and their neighbours, but that it had

---

[312] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 61.
[313] *Ibid.* p. 61.

upheld their fathers and would uphold their children. But, as Egremont points out, monastic

power was proven to be both mortal and prone to excess, and the people did not rise up in

defence of their benevolent landlords (or if they did, it was already too late).[314]

But pointing out that Gerard's reckoning of the popular benefits of monastic

(ad)ministration is rooted in an idealized version of history, is, I think, beside the point. What I

think is most useful about Gerard's history of monastic authority is that it is positioned as part of

a narrative of England's agrarian past, and as a model for a productive future. In Disraeli's

contemporary England, parliament is the new deathless body that governs, and therefore must

take responsibility for, the people. However, where private ownership was prohibited for the

monastics, it has now become the prevailing mode of socio-political organisation. And the

prioritisation of profits over people dissolves personal loyalties and emotional investment in the

success of the imagined future through raised rents, and the unjustified entitlement of new

hereditary landlords.

This is why Trafford's model mill is so important to the righting of England's social

wrongs. Trafford, like Egremont, is a younger son of a noble family who must find his own

living. Briefly, Trafford's workroom is spacious, well-lit and well-ventilated.[315] His village

provides safe and wholesome housing for his employees, schools for their intellectual

development, and a gothic church for their spiritual care. Most importantly, his own house is at

the centre of the village, modelling bourgeois respectability, for 'he comprehended his position

too well to draw himself into vulgar exclusiveness from his real dependents, but recognised the

baronial principle, […] adapted to the […] more ingenious circumstances of the times'.[316]

Accordingly, Trafford's mill realises the kind of past/future combination that *Sybil* presents as

the right kind of progress. But the novel does not limit this ethos to the mechanical structures of

the industrial economy. Gerard's understanding of this same principle develops the sympathetic

---

[314] *Ibid.* p. 63.
[315] *Ibid.* pp. 181-82.
[316] *Ibid.* p. 182.

social relationship between him and Egremont that becomes the first step towards Egremont's enlightenment.

Upon his first entrance into the Gerard cottage, in order to avoid the embarrassment of revealing his station, Egremont creates an alias, and introduces himself as a Mr Franklin, associated with the press. Gerard's reaction to Egremont's claimed identity creates the conditions for their sympathetic identification with one another, 'a good English name of a good English class that has disappeared […] I was a Franklin's son myself'.[317] Gerard's open generosity toward Egremont is based purely upon their imaginary resemblances as neither one of them is truly a Franklin. Gerard, by the way, refers to a medieval class of land-owning freeman, which was neither a part of the gentry, nor of the nobility; it is a class which has literally disappeared in England, and yet, is the basis by which Gerard and Egremont might be linked beyond their chance meeting. And this reframing of the historical past is essential to Gerard's framing of the present condition of the country, as much as they are significant to his understanding of himself.

Gerard assembles his identity out of his family connections to the past: Saxon peasants, monastic people, an ancestor at Azincourt, a Franklin father, and a line of Sybils stretching back to King John, are all ingredients that, when added together, produce the Gerard of the present.[318] And unlike the Fitz-Warenes, Gerard's pedigree is genuine, and disavows nothing. However, his resentment toward aristocrats, fanned by the search for the documents proving his entitlement to Mowbray Castle, would normally preclude his sympathetic identification with one such as Egremont and his manufactured history. Ironically, Egremont's fortunate lie, itself a constructed identity, makes space for Gerard's sympathetic identification with the man at its centre. Moreover, the imagined resemblance Gerard sees between the two, allows him to make claims

---

[317] *Ibid.* p. 137.
[318] *Ibid.* p. 174.

about Egremont's history as well, and to position them alongside one another, not in a vertical

class hierarchy, but in a timeline of national history that stretches into the 'immemorial past'.

(ii) Charles Egremont and the English Future

Egremont's development out of his careless and ignorant youth and into a mature, enlightened

protagonist is a function of his thinking, feeling interior self, which accompanies manful political

activity. And though the novel does make much of what is sure to be an eminent political career

(the book ends before he gets too far along,) I want to read Egremont's sympathetic awakening

as primarily a personal/ private transformation. Certainly, his enlivened sympathies are the

defining feature of his politics, and what allows him to resist Morley's anti-sympathetic, divisive

Two Nations narrative. And to be sure, that Gerard is the father of his sympathetic awakening is

not insignificant. However, in closing this chapter, I want to demonstrate the ways in which

Egremont is framed as not only contiguous with a common English past, but representative of

her 'limitless future'. To do so, I will turn back to the issue of *Sybil*'s marriage plot, for

Egremont's sympathetic awakening is inextricable from his sexual desire, and the fecundity

implied by the marriage plot is crucial to the literal (re)production necessary to England's future.

In the scene just before Egremont visits the Gerard cottage for the first time, Egremont

reflects on what, other than his desire for Sybil, has drawn him so perceptibly to the Gerards:

'they feel and they think: two habits that have gone quite out of fashion, if they ever existed,

among my friends'.[319] Notwithstanding the connections to Hume's 'feeling and thinking'

explored in the previous chapter, Egremont's appreciation for the Gerards accords exactly with

those traits that drive him (emotionally) away from his peers: the 'great system of exclusive

manners and exclusive feelings' .[320] If Egremont is repelled by his social equals for their

inaccessible feelings, he is drawn to the Gerards for the contrary reason. Their openness and the

---

[319] *Ibid.* p. 175.
[320] *Ibid.* p. 35.

availability of their feelings invites Egremont's sympathetic participation in their lives. By aligning himself with what he finds appealing in the Gerards, Egremont reveals what he most values about himself, and draws a clear distinction between the deep political thoughts and sense of social responsibility of the Gerards and the shallowness of political ambition and the pervasive misunderstanding of 'the people' exhibited by his 'friends'. For Egremont, thinking and feeling precipitate acting with the moral integrity he values, which is why the revelation, not just that he is a member of the nobility, but that he has deceived them all is so devastating. Thus, his fictitious identity is not only a means of establishing an acquaintance with Gerard and Sybil, but also a means of distancing himself from the rest of the aristocracy. Perhaps it is ironic then, given that the Franklin identity is fictional, that it enables Egremont to cast off some of the pretence of the manners, breeding, and customs that otherwise might divide him from the Gerards, and, in some measure, to become one of them.

In the same scene in which Egremont recognises the intellectual and emotional depths of 'the people', his sympathetic awakening is described as a figurative reshaping of the mind and of the senses. The description is predicated on Egremont's sudden awareness of his own ignorance, which he dates back to the meeting scene at Marney Abbey. Though this was a short, spontaneous event, it proved instrumental in making real 'the people,' not only as a category, but as individuals:

It seemed to Egremont that, from the day he met those persons in the Abbey ruins, the horizon of his experience had insensibly expanded; more than that, there were streaks of light breaking in the distance which already gave a new aspect to much that was known, and which perhaps was ultimately destined to reveal much that was now obscure. He could not resist the conviction that from the time in question, his sympathies had become more lively and more extended; that a masculine impulse had been given to his mind; that he was inclined to view public questions in a tone very different to that in which he had surveyed them a few weeks back.[321]

---

[321] *Ibid.* p. 132.

The acquaintance with the Gerards results in the distension of Egremont's sympathy, so that he is literally and metaphorically able to see further than his own sphere of personal experience (recall, Williams's phrase, 'the view from the train'). The brightening of the skyscape, which allows him to see 'into the obscure distance', figures his own enlightenment. This also is illustrative of one way that the Victorians understood the role of the social-problem novel. Here, the novel is the supplement to personal experience, awakening in the reader the sense that there are things unknown to them (in this case, the condition of the working class,) at the same time that it appears to dispel that same new-found ignorance. Disraeli himself wrote the passages on Wodgate not from his personal experience, but from having read parliamentary blue books, adding yet another layer in the deferral of actual experience.[322] It is important to note that Egremont himself never goes amongst the poor, aside from his visit to Warren's cottage, there is no need for him to literally see their degradation. Instead, he completes his sympathetic transformation by learning about the condition of the people from Gerard, Mr St Lys and Trafford. And Egremont's sight, like the reader's, remains figurative.

However, Egremont's sympathetic awakening actually begins long before the conversation in Marney Abbey. As a young man he formed an attachment to Arabella, Marney's wife, but the prideful manipulation of her mother ended the connection and Egremont was given up for his older brother. In his bitter disappointment, Egremont realizes that though his formal education has been completed, he understands nothing of the world, and departs on a long period of travel. This choice to leave England represents more than just the relief of Egremont's wounded pride, but, as is often the case, Egremont's travel offers him greater experience of the world. His sudden awareness of the private injustices that aristocrats commit against one another, also results in Egremont's conscious distancing of himself from them. This first lesson of disappointed love, is the germ of Egremont's later sympathetic development:

---

[322] Sheila Smith, 'Notes', in *Sybil*, p. 440.

> To be conscious that you are ignorant is a great step to knowledge. Before an emancipated intellect and an expanding intelligence, the great system of exclusive manners and exclusive feelings in which he had been born and nurtured, began to tremble; the native generosity of his heart recoiled at a reoccurrence to that arrogant and frigid life, alike devoid of sympathy and real grandeur.[323]

Egremont's informal and indispensable education begins at the moment of his rejection. Significantly, Marney is not even the preferred suitor, and Egremont is actually thrown over in preference for Marney's title. In this early moment of Egremont's development, sympathy seems to function as a stand-in for justice and for deep understanding, later figured as 'thinking' and 'feeling'. Egremont's sudden consciousness of his own ignorance reinforces the novel's pedagogical aims, revealing to him the uncomfortable and unsavoury subtext of the social order. The novel, likewise, reveals to the reader the parallel debasement of the aristocracy, which figures as decadent corruption, and of the people, which is the effect of ignorance and neglect.

It is not coincidental that both moments of enlightenment are predicated by Egremont's sexual desire for women beyond him, though neither Arabella nor Sybil are truly responsible for the activation of Egremont's sympathy. These women triangulate and give meaning to the relationships Egremont forms with other men, rather than with themselves. Both Lord Marney and Stephen Morley are cast as rivals to Egremont, though for the attention of different women. While Marney is tyrannical, Morley is insincere, and both stand to benefit from the inherited prejudices of their respective classes. Egremont intentionally positions himself as an analogue to Morley by giving himself an imaginary career with a newspaper. This conveniently conceals his unfamiliarity with the county and with the concerns of the people. Of course, Morley is also Egremont's closest competitor for the attentions and affections of Sybil, and Egremont's decision to claim a comparative identity sets the two up as direct opposites. Sybil is also the lynchpin of Egremont's relationship to Walter Gerard, with whom Egremont only pursues an acquaintance because he has been transfixed by his daughter. However, Disraeli's sympathy is

---

[323] Disraeli, p. 35.

not animated by the passions, and is decidedly unfeminine. Because this version of sympathy incorporates an obligation to responsible political activity, Disraeli's mobilization of sympathy is primarily a logical exchange between men. This paternalistic vision of sympathy mirrors the paternal aristocratic ideal that this novel asserts.

The significance of the rivalry between Morley and Egremont for Sybil's affection is a stand-in for the politics they represent. Morley's radical vision of communal landownership and social levelling clashes against the 'finely-graded hierarchy' Egremont comes to espouse.[324] The novel advocates the natural relationship of the 'real' aristocracy to labour and the land, which Egremont eventually fulfils through his marriage to Sybil and the fortunate death of his brother. Despite Sybil's apparent status as a 'daughter of the people', the existence of papers proving Gerard's dispossession from Mowbray undercuts the gulf between her and Egremont. Not only is Morley privy to the secret of Gerard's status, but he is instrumental in finding Baptist Hatton and recovering the all-important documents. But the assistance Morley provides is motivated entirely by self-interest, as he reveals in his sexually fraught proposal to Sybil. He claims to have served Gerard, despite their political differences, out of affection for Sybil. However, in the early stages of their search for Hatton, Gerard promises Morley a parcel of land on which to form his experimental commune once the papers are recovered. Morley clearly has a vested interest in the redistribution of the land, reflected in his proposal, which he cannot separate from a declaration of politics. Moreover, were Sybil to accept his proposal, Morley would gain greater control over the land after Gerard's death. Egremont, on the other hand, has no foreknowledge of the existence of the papers, and therefore his attachment to Sybil is disinterested. Neither does he deliberately seek the property of his brother; like the monks of old, Egremont is uninterested in the accumulation of private property, which only serves to demonstrate his fitness for the responsible management of the land. In contrast to the Marneys' and Mowbrays' past,

---

[324] Chris R. Vanden Bossche, *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency and the Victorian Novel 1832-1867,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 90.

Egremont's integrity justifies the appropriateness of his rank, though, in the end, he comes into possession of both properties through the application of traditional hereditary land rights.

The marriage between Sybil and Egremont is more than a love match; it is, as many have acknowledged, an allegorical joining, though what, or who, the husband and wife represent has been much disputed. In my opinion, Sybil and Egremont's marriage is foretold in the first few chapters. In an effort to avoid paying for Egremont's campaign debts, Marney plans out his brother's future: 'I know Mowbray well; he will make an eldest son of his eldest daughter. She will have it all [...] and you are to marry her'.[325] Of course, Egremont will never marry Lady Joan Fitz-Warene, but the joining of Marney, to Mowbray, with Sybil as the heiress resolves the novel's push to unite past and future. Sybil's Saxon ancestry stretches back through English history and provides Egremont with a tenable link to the past, at the same time that her female body is a representation of the future. So too is Egremont the voice of England's youth, and the product of English history.

---

[325] Disraeli, p. 70.

'Consigned to Oblivion': Artistic Insight versus Violent Incitement, and the Disappearance of Frances Trollope's _Michael Armstrong_[326]

The preceding chapters demonstrate that while writers like Thomas Carlyle and Benjamin Disraeli were concerned by the growing disparity in wealth and living conditions between the rich and the poor, both resisted the notion that a redistribution of access to political power would improve the situation. In fact, both assert that what the country needed, more than significant political reform, is the elevation of a 'working aristocracy', or an 'aristocracy of talent'; in _Sybil_ Egremont and Mr Trafford both fulfil this role.[327] Perhaps more importantly, both men position the proper application of sympathetic understanding as necessary to the revitalization of England. In chapter one, I argued that while Carlyle sees the destructive potential of dynamic sympathy (which comes to be represented by the concept of 'frenzy' and the Parisian mob,) he also recognizes that sympathy withheld is similarly damaging to the stability of the state. In chapter two I argued that sympathy is essential to the process of 'thinking the nation' that Disraeli recommends in _Sybil_. Thus, he positions true sympathy as paternal, nationalistic and, by its very nature, anti-revolutionary. The critical difference underlying these competing versions of sympathy is that where Carlylean sympathy makes room for the transference of unsocial passions from the proletariat to the bourgeoise, and vice versa, Disraeli, like Adam Smith, posits working-class emotions that are fundamentally distinct in origin and composition from middle-class emotions. But this view of the emotions isn't solely responsible for Disraeli's resistance to democratization, just as the potency of Carlyle's emotions don't soften him to the cause either.

In this chapter I want to read one of the few industrial novels that openly defends the constitutionality of working-class demonstration and demands for greater access to political power. Frances Milton Trollope's _Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy_ (1839) did indeed make far

---

[326] Review of _Michael Armstrong_ in _Bolton Free Press_ 22 February 1840, qtd. by William Chaloner in 'Mrs Trollope and the Early Factory System', _Victorian Studies_, (1960), 4.2, 159-66, p. 165.
[327] Carlyle, _Past and Present_, p. 91.

more radical claims about the necessity of actual legislative reforms than any of the other novels in my study. The novel was met with significant resistance in the periodical press, and many of its larger claims have been overshadowed by this controversy and the novel's relative obscurity in modern literary criticism. I want to argue that the uproar this novel caused is clear evidence of the Victorian belief that novels materially impacted the lives of the real people they purported to represent, which scholarship usually considers to be optimistically naïve. Nevertheless, contemporary reactions to *Michael Armstrong* all recognize the tangible effects of fiction and sympathy on the reading public; what is unusual about all of this is that there are two divergent strands of this argument. Defenders of *Michael Armstrong* and the social-problem novel more broadly argued that novels 'exposed' social ills to the reading public and stirred their sympathies as part of an effort to move the 'resistless […] weight of public opinion' toward reform.[328] These novels performed a necessary social function, supplying information otherwise withheld from the public, and were a means of figuratively punishing those that most deserve it. Opponents of *Michael Armstrong* also recognized the novel's encouragement of sympathetic identification with the poor as part of its central project; however, they portrayed this as a disingenuous courting of working-class rage that posed a real threat to middle-class readers and mill-owners. For these reviewers, the novel was dangerous because its arguments and emotions most appealed to the working-class, and unfairly punished the wrong people for the problem of industrialism.

The majority of this fight about who the novel ought to appeal to, and what kind of work the novel ought to do was waged outside of the text, and so my first section will deal mainly with contemporary reviews of *Michael Armstrong* and Trollope's response to them. But I want to use my second section to turn to the actual text of the novel and read some of the scenes that deal explicitly with middle-class attempts to *write* the working-class experience into existence. The villainous mill-owner, Sir Matthew Dowling twice produces his own text about Michael

---

[328] Advert for *Michael Armstrong*, 'New Readerships', *John Bull*, (London, 24 March 1839), no. 954, p. 135.

Armstrong, once in an 'anonymous' article sent to the local paper, and once writing a play that glorifies his adoption of the factory boy.[329] These works convince most of the neighbourhood of Sir Matthew's 'benevolence' at the same time that they produce knowledge about the unfeeling working-class that conforms to, and thus confirms, Dowling's already-held beliefs.[330] One of the few characters capable of seeing-through Dowling's narrative is the alternate protagonist, Mary Brotherton, who ignores Dowling's words, and reads Michael's real emotions during the play. This scene serves a pivotal function in which Mary becomes conscious of her own ignorance and she spends the rest of the novel in search of the truth about the factory system, compelled by her sympathetic understanding of Michael as a feeling subject. But, while *Michael Armstrong* seems almost preternaturally conscious of the role of art objects in producing knowledge about marginalised groups that would come to be a cornerstone of the Marxist approach to the study of literature, the novel can't quite fully subvert narrative form, or escape the Victorian 'structure of feeling' it was a part of. By way of example, I want to end my discussion of *Michael Armstrong* by considering the extent to which it is truly radical. While Trollope's insistence that the working class have a legal and moral right to protest their conditions, her framing of working-class desire as something that can be performed in accordance with bourgeois ideals undercuts the radical potential of her argument.

(I) Contexts: Frances Trollope in Literary Criticism, and the Backdrop to **Michael Armstrong**

Frances Milton Trollope's 1839 novel *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* is likely the least familiar of the novels in this study; this is partially because Trollope's status as a novelist had been largely forgotten, even by the end of the nineteenth century, partially because *Michael Armstrong* was so poorly received at the time of its publication, and partially because of the way the Condition-of-England group of novels has been retroactively constructed in literary

---

[329] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong,* p. 45.
[330] *Ibid.* p. 45.

criticism. Indeed, the novel was published the year before Carlyle's *Chartism* and four years before *Past and Present*, so it cannot even properly be called a Condition-of-England novel, because it predated Carlyle's influential frame. And while Fanny Trollope was a prolific and successful writer from the 1830s-50s, her fame has largely been overshadowed by her most successful son, Anthony.[331] Thus, it is only relatively recently that her work has enjoyed a 'rediscovery' propelled by a feminist re-evaluation of popular and sentimental fiction.[332] As the reassessment of Trollope the novelist has been going on, *Michael Armstrong* has also gone from being a lesser-known off-shoot of the core texts usually found in discussions of the Victorian industrial novel, and since the 1980s has received increasing critical attention. At the time of writing, there have been at least two special journal issues devoted to the life and work of Frances Trollope, and readings of *Michael Armstrong* have featured in the work of Rosemarie Bodenheimer, Caroline Betensky, Elsie B Michie, Constance Harsh, Priti Johnson and many others. But still, neither Trollope nor *Michael Armstrong* have yet reached the kind of easy recognition of some of her better-known contemporaries. For this reason, before getting into my argument in relation to *Michael Armstrong*, I think it worth providing a (much abridged) biography of the authoress, a brief overview of the novel's plot, and a little context about the publication history of the novel.

Frances Milton in was born in 1779 in Bristol to Rev William Milton, and his first wife Mary Gresley. Mary died just five or six years later, and William remarried Sarah Partington in 1800.[333] Frances did not enjoy a close relationship with her stepmother and moved to London, where she met and eventually married barrister Thomas Anthony Trollope in 1809. The couple had seven children, six of whom lived beyond infancy, and five into adulthood. In 1818 the

---

[331] Tamara S Wagner, *Beyond Domestic Manners*: Repositioning Frances Trollope in Literary History, *Women's Writing*, (2011), 18.2, DOI:10.1080/09699082.2011.553263, 153-66, p. 153.

[332] *Ibid*. p. 153.

[333] Pamela Neville-Sington, 'Trollope [nee] Milton, Frances [Fanny] (1779-1863) Travel Writer and Novelist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2008), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27751 [accessed 1 May 2019], 1-8, pp. 2-3.

family moved to Julian Hill, a farm in Harrow, which put the family under significant financial strain. As part of an effort to relieve some of the financial pressures incurred by her husband's agricultural debts and her son Henry's idleness, in 1826 Frances and her two daughters travelled to America. There they joined the Nashoba community in Tennessee; this was an experimental community founded by Frances Wright, dedicated to the education and emancipation of slaves without significant financial loss to slave holders.[334] Though Frances Trollope did not stay with the community for long, her time in the southern slave-holding states and travelling along the Mississippi River would come to be reflected in her travel writing and novels. After several failed business ventures in the States, Frances Trollope returned to England in 1831. From there, at the age of fifty-three, she wrote and sold her first book *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). The publication was wildly popular, particularly in England and Europe, and remained in print until the end of the century, though, it must be said, Trollope's humorous critique was less-well received on the other side of the Atlantic.[335] Following this initial success, Frances became the family's main bread winner, earning a living by her pen up to and long after the death of her husband Thomas Anthony in 1835.

Trollope was so successful as a novelist that at the height of her fame even Charles Dickens thought of her as a serious rival. As an aside, pre-publication adverts for *Michael Armstrong* deliberately emphasised the similarities between the two novelists, and it is clear that Dickens regarded this as an attempt to capitalise on his widespread popularity. This isn't entirely without cause, since the first advert for *Michael Armstrong* declared that the novel would be 'printed and embellished uniformly with the *Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby,* &c'.[336] Subsequent notices also continued in this vein, announcing, 'Mrs Trollope is about to enter the lists with Boz, in a monthly illustrated publication […] the cheap form of publication, so much in vogue at

---

[334] Gail Bederman, 'Revisiting Nashoba: Slavery, Utopia, and Frances Wright in America, 1818-1826', *American Literary History*, 17.3, (2005), 438-59, p. 438.
[335] Neville-Sington, p. 6.
[336] *Examiner*, (London, 3 February 1839), p. 16.

present, has been, we think, most judiciously chosen for her work'.[337] Dickens refused to write to Colburn on the matter, though it is clear in diary entries and letters to friends that he was annoyed by the association and regarded Trollope's forthcoming novel as a poor imitation of his own work.[338] When it had become clear that the factory system was the object of Trollope's novel, Dickens even went so far as to alter the course of *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) to focus more on Dotheboys Hall, and he privately quipped that Trollope might soon find 'Ticholas Tickleby' was a better name than Michael Armstrong.[339] And while there were other novelists taking an interest in the troubling aspects of industrialisation—Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's industrial novel *Helen Fleetwood*, for example, began serialisation in *The Christian Ladies Magazine* just one month later—Dickens and his circle seemed to regard Trollope's factory novel as a serious encroachment on a literary trend he was at the centre of.

Controversy aside, by the time of her death in October of 1863, Frances Trollope had amassed an extensive catalogue of both novels and travel writing. Her fiction engaged with a wide range of social and political subjects, and she became well-known for her 'satirical wit'.[340] However, by the 1880s Frances Trollope's novels were rarely being reprinted. Pamela Neville-Sington has suggested that one possible reason for this sudden erasure of her work from the public consciousness could be the efforts of her son, Anthony, to distance himself (and his work) from her.[341] In his *Autobiography*, Anthony expressed embarrassment about the quality of his mother's writing, her political plots, and her tendency toward exaggeration. It is somewhat ironic, then, that literary critics have made much of the clear influence of Fanny's novels on her most successful son's fictional work.[342]

---

[337] New Readerships, *John Bull*, (London, 10 February 1839), no. 948, p. 62.

[338] Charles Dickens, 'Diary Entry: Friday 8 Feb 1839', in *The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol I: 1820 – 1839*, ed. by Madeline House and Graham Storey, Pilgrim edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 640.

[339] Charles Dickens, 'Letter to S Laman Blanchard 9 Feb 1839', *Letters of Charles Dickens*, pp. 506-07.

[340] Neville-Sington, p. 5.

[341] *Ibid.* p. 6.

[342] Wagner, p. 157.

(i) Frances Trollope and the Mid-Century Social-Problem Novel in the Press

Of particular interest to this study are Trollope's pair of social-problem novels from the 1830s.

Though the subject and setting of Trollope's anti-slavery novel *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan*

Jefferson Whitlaw, or Scenes on the Mississippi (1836) place it well beyond the scope of my study, it is

worth introducing here because of the relationship between these two novels in the Victorian

public consciousness. Published more than a decade before Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle*

Tom's Cabin (1852), *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* commences with the birth of the title character at his

father's remote trading post on the Mississippi River.[343] While at work on the trading post, the

enterprising JJ gets noticed by wealthy plantation owner and slaveholder, Colonel Dart,

eventually becoming the overseer and heir-apparent of Dart's Paradise Plantation. The novel

follows two other parallel families, Whitlaw Sr's German abolitionist neighbours, the Steinmarks,

and the orphaned children of a 'virtuous' slave-owner, Edward and Lucy Bligh.[344] The plot is

episodic, borrowing heavily from the picaresque tradition, but Jonathan remains a cruel and

irredeemable character throughout, eventually dying at the hands of some of the slaves on

Paradise Plantation. Neither the Steinmarks, nor the Blighs can reform the system from within;

Edward is lynched for hosting clandestine prayer meetings for the slaves, and the rest return to

Germany taking Lucy and former slaves Phebe and Caesar with them. Like *Domestic Manners*,

Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw was well-received in England and Europe where her rejection of slavery

was appreciated, but harshly criticised in America.

Three years later Trollope turned her attention back to England, and another social ill for

the subject of her next novel: infant labour and the factory system. Trollope challenged the

exploitation of child employees in the 'monster spinning-mills' of Northern England, and

---

[343] *Ibid.* p. 154.
[344] Frances Trollope, *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw, or Scenes on the Mississippi*, (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1836) p. 58.

explicitly supported remedial legislation like the Ten Hours Bill.[345] *Michael Armstrong* is littered with vivid descriptions of the filthy conditions inside factories, and the violence committed by overseers on starving, ill, exhausted and mutilated child bodies is in keeping with the kinds of arguments Ten-Hours campaigners used to further their claims. The movement explicitly deployed grotesque depictions of child labour in order to harness growing popular concern for the condition of infant workers and translate public opinion into better working conditions for children and adults. But some reviewers complained that the conditions in the novel's factories was already out-of-date by the time the novel was published. In fact, the Factory Act of 1833, passed nearly six years before *Michael Armstrong* was in print, addressed some of the claims early campaigners were striving for by excluding children under nine from factory work, limiting the working hours of children nine and older based on their age, stipulating an amount of schooling that factories were obligated to provide and implementing a system of independent inspection.[346] Still, there were many readers that were horrified by the conditions that the novel exposed, and the treatment child labourers were subjected to.

Set in a fictional version of Manchester called Ashleigh, the novel begins by describing the home and family life of cruel mill-owner Sir Matthew Dowling. Sir Matthew flirts (under his wife's nose) with the highest-ranking woman in the neighbourhood, Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, who convinces him to exit his own dinner party through the window and walk with her out of doors. In a scene clearly designed for comic effect, the pair are set upon by a cow, which is then shooed away (in distinctly undramatic fashion) by Michael, a child labourer in Dowling's mill, who just happened to be nearby. No good deed goes unpunished, however, and Lady Clarissa insists that Dowling adopt Michael in gratitude for his service. Michael does not want to be adopted, as he already has a family, and Dowling does not want to do any adopting, as he is

---

[345] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, p. iii.
[346] Walton, p. 278.

selfish and hates his child-employees, but Lady Clarissa forces the issue, and Michael is taken

away from his mother to live in Dowling's house.

After parading Michael around the neighbourhood in several undisguised attempts to

better his own reputation, and after forcing Michael to take part in a disastrous play meant to re-

enact his 'rescue' of Lady Clarissa, Dowling apprentices Michael to the notorious Deep Valley

Mill. A number of years pass, during which Michael suffers a near fatal illness and disappears

from the narrative completely for several chapters. During this period, the plot follows the

attempts of the young heiress Mary Brotherton to find and rescue Michael, whom she first

comes into contact with during the play at Dowling's house. She recognizes the child's misery

right away, and immediately sets about learning all she can about the factory system, which

requires a good deal of disabusing her former nurse of commonly held beliefs about the real

conditions of the poor. The irony here is that Mary's father had also been a mill-owner, and a

successful one at that, given that she is now the 'richest young lady in Lancashire'.[347] But, as

Betensky points out, Mary's 'moral capital' is rooted in the balance between her 'complete'

ignorance about the factory system and her pursuit of knowledge about the poor, which never

quite adds up to complicity with the system.[348] Circumventing expectations that would regard the

success of the middle-class interventionist as given, Mary is unable to find Michael and adopts

his elder brother Edward and Fanny Fletcher, a female apprentice from Deep Valley Mill,

instead.

Following Mary's defeat, the focus of the novel shifts again and Michael is revealed to be

alive. He escapes from Deep Valley Mill, wanders the Derbyshire moors, is eventually taken in

by a kindly farmer who educates and employs him fairly. Once well and a bit more grown-up,

Michael returns to Ashleigh in search of his family who are now gone. To gloss the end, Michael

takes part in a non-violent demonstration of working men in pursuit of their rights, crosses paths

---

[347] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, p. 235.
[348] Caroline Betensky, 'Knowing Too Much and Never Enough: Knowledge and Moral Capital in Frances
Trollope's *Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong*', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, (2002), 36.1, 61-78, pp. 62-63.

with the remainder of the Dowling family, bears witness to Sir Matthew's death, eventually finds Mary Brotherton and reunites with both Fanny and his brother. Thereafter the group removes to Germany and two marriages are hastily tacked on to the final chapter.

The novel was published by Henry Colburn in twelve independent illustrated instalments from March 1839 to February 1840. Almost immediately, the novel received 'torrents of abuse' in the periodical press, the extremity of which made these reactions remarkable, since 'other women writers on this emotive topic did not attract similar venom'.[349] Interestingly, this was also the first novel written by a female to be published in this format, an innovation which Susan Walton has suggested may have contributed to its unfavourable reception.[350] Indeed, the *John Bull* advert quoted above seems to pre-emptively justify the format by asserting that the 'cheap form of publication […] has been […] judiciously chosen'.[351] According to Walton, there was still some lingering scepticism around the cheapness of serialisation which made it appear indecent, especially when connected with women writers. Walton has also argued that readers may have been troubled by the inclusion of illustrations alongside the text of *Michael Armstrong*, which inappropriately revealed working-class bodies to the female gaze.[352] While I do think that serialisation contributed to some of the vitriol the novel received, I think it has less to do with Trollope's femaleness and more to do with fears about the novel's reach. Take, for example, the *John Bull* advert for *Michael Armstrong* from the following month, which again defends the choice to serialise, but this time writes 'the cheapest form of publication has been adopted, that the work may find its way into the cottage as well as into the drawing-room'.[353] This later advert makes clear the association between cheap books and a working-class readership that would come to preoccupy periodical reviewers as new numbers of *Michael Armstrong* were released.

---

[349] Walton, p. 278.
[350] Susan Walton, 'Industrial Sightseeing and Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy*', *Women's Writing*, (2011), 18.2, 273-292, p. 280.
[351] *John Bull* (10 Feb 1839), p. 62.
[352] Walton, p. 288.
[353] 'New readerships', *John Bull*, (London, 24 March 1839), no. 954, p. 135.

One review which appeared in the *Bolton Free Press* in February of 1840 argued that Trollope's novel was an 'exaggerated statement of the vices of a class' and therefore 'a mischievous attempt to excite the worst and bitterest feelings against men, who are, like other men, creatures of circumstance, in which their lot has been cast'.[354] Here, the reviewer explicitly states that the novel wilfully misrepresents millowners and their vices as the irredeemably villainous catalysts of infant labour in England, when manufactures and workers are both equally subject to the vagaries of fate. In this account, the condition of the poor has not only been exaggerated in Trollope's novel, but also unfairly attributed to 'blameless' manufacturers and landowners when the real cause of the poor's condition is the 'most pernicious fruit […] the corn laws'.[355] The reviewer expressly unites the manufacturing middle-class with agrarian and aristocratic landownership, arguing that neither of these (voting) parties are at fault, and that Trollope's novel fundamentally misunderstands the economic landscape. This removes the conditions *within* factories from the debate and inserts an impersonal third-party to off-load responsibility for the general condition of the poor onto, namely, inefficient economic policy. The reviewer further defends the united middle and upper classes from the 'coarse and violent abuse' levelled at them, by characterising them as 'victims'.[356] Critically, the reason that the *Bolton Free Press* gives for writing that *Michael Armstrong* 'should be consigned to oblivion' is its ability to 'excite' bitter feelings in readers that transform into 'coarse and violent abuse'.[357] It is clear, however, that the reviewer is specifically concerned with working-class feelings and working-class violence, indicated by the 'coarse' descriptor.

In August of 1839 numbers I - VI of *Michael Armstrong* were reviewed in the *Athenaeum*. The review is scathing, spanning twelve full columns over four pages, and, like that of the *Bolton Free Press*, is particularly concerned with the effect *Michael Armstrong* was having on working-class

---

[354] *Bolton Free Press*, (10 Feb 1840), qtd. in Chaloner, p. 165.
[355] *Ibid.* p. 165.
[356] *Ibid.* p. 165.
[357] *Ibid.* p 165.

readers. Following some preliminary remarks about the periodical's long-standing protest of the use of child labour in all employments, the reviewer writes:

We were unwilling, without further evidence to believe, notwithstanding some strong indications to the contrary, that this popular, cheap, and widely diffusible medium, was chosen for the purpose of scattering firebrands among the people, for wantonly decrying and discrediting a class of persons whose operations are intimately bound up with the very existence of the nation, and for adding to that already mounting sum of discontent, which under the name of Chartism, is [a] matter of such grave and fearful interest to every enlightened lover of our country. That this is the practical tendency of the work must now be evident.[358]

The reviewer also spends the majority of the review listing the various ways that Trollope has misunderstood and misrepresented the state of the economy. He is suspicious of the novel as a medium for the critique of the 'natural laws' that govern wages, rents and 'the progress of commerce'.[359] Like the review from the *Bolton Free Press* above, this reviewer clearly takes the side of mill-owners, writing 'the manufacturer is the part more sinned against than sinning'.[360] But overall, the review is alarmed by the use of a 'popular, cheap and widely diffusible medium' whose one-shilling price per issue put the novel within easy reach of excitable working-class consumers. The review posits that the novel's express purpose was to literally stoke working-class discontent and 'scatter firebrands' among the people. In my discussion of 'Signs of the Times' in chapter one, I argued that Carlyle used the image of the flame and forge in a number of different ways, but mainly to illustrate the destructive potential of the sympathetic emotions. This reviewer's use of the same metaphor reveals a tacit belief in the novel as a vehicle of dangerous emotion, especially because it is 'disseminated among an ignorant and excited population' and fanned the 'heated imaginations of our great manufacturing towns'.[361]

---

[358] 'Review of *Michael Armstrong*', *Athenaeum*, ed. by James Holmes (London, 10 August 1839), 587-590, p. 588.
[359] *Ibid.* p. 587.
[360] *Ibid.* p. 590.
[361] *Ibid.* p 588.

The *Athenaeum* review (at 4p per weekly issue) is informed by two mutually reinforcing assumptions about how the novel acted on the mind of readers and *who* was most likely to be reading. First, much of the review's critique is dependent upon the idea of the working-class reader. Literacy was improving throughout the century and was starting to extend beyond the upper classes, but it really wasn't until the end of the century that 'basic literacy was almost universal'.[362] By contrast, we know that in 1837 (two years before *Michael Armstrong* was published) only 'about half of the adult male population could read or write'.[363] While Colburn did advertise the novel's serialisation in terms that emphasised its availability to the working-class, it is unlikely that the novel was expressly intended for the working class, rather than the middle class. That much of the novel is really concerned with Mary Brotherton's adventures looking for Michael and learning about the conditions in factories makes this evident. Surely Mary's education would not have revealed any new information to actual working people. More to the point, the novel's melancholy outlook on personal benevolence, though ostensibly directed at Mary in particular, hails the middle-class reader wishing to act upon the information that the novel provides. When Mary interviews Parson Bell, a minister known to be campaigning for the Ten-Hours Bill, he doesn't express much confidence in the 'ordinary modes' of charitable activity.[364] Rather, Parson Bell says

Despite the inclination I feel both for your sake, and that of the poor operatives, to encourage your generous benevolence, I cannot in conscience tell you that it is in your power to effectually assist them. That you may save your own excellent heart from the palsy of hopeless and helpless pity, by the indulgence of your benevolence in individual cases of distress, I need not point out to you; but that any of the ordinary modes of being useful on a larger scale, such as organising schools, founding benefit societies, or the like, could be of any use to beings so crushed, so toil-worn, and degraded, it would be idle to hope.[365]

---

[362] Catherine Robson and Caroline T Christ, 'Literacy, Publication and Reading', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Vol E, 'The Victorian Age', 1017-1883, p. 1035.
[363] *Ibid.* p. 1035.
[364] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, p. 209.
[365] *Ibid.* pp. 208-09.

Bell's list of the established methods of wealthy philanthropes attributes little long-term value to these activities, which has the effect of excusing the middle class from their usual charitable responsibilities. If even the wealthiest altruist cannot meaningfully ameliorate the suffering of operatives (Trollope's chosen title for the industrial working class) without the intervention of parliament, it seems only fair that middle-class readers share in this reprieve. I do want to return to Parson Bell's recommendation later in the chapter, but for now, I think its usefully representative of Trollope's implied reader, which is fundamentally at odds with how the *Athenaeum* reviewer represents the novel's readership.

Additionally, the review is openly suspicious of novel and its accompanying illustrations as a medium for the kind of argument Trollope is making, writing 'fiction is no instrument for the eliminations [sic.] of particular truths'.[366] In fact, the reviewer goes so far as to imply that Trollope had been paid to write *Michael Armstrong* 'out of the National Charter fund'.[367] The problem with fiction, then, is that it has no obligation to the truth, and that it is too much a product of the predispositions of the author, rather than a fair representation of the reality. In contrast, the reviewer positions the periodical itself as a corrective to 'any violence of re-action which a woman's sympathies may have inspired'.[368] To this end, the reviewer writes, 'we consider it no unimportant part of our duties, as journalists, to cast a watchful eye on whatever touches the interests of the operatives'.[369] Thus, journalists are both objective transmitters of the truth in regard to the factory system, and the real disinterested caretakers of the working class. They, the article suggests, have nothing to gain by inflaming the reading public, and encourage Mrs Trollope to 'reflect and reconsider whether, if such abuses really abound, the instrument she employs is a fit engine for procuring redress'.[370]

---

[366] *Athenaeum*, (10 August 1839), p. 587.
[367] *Ibid.* p. 588.
[368] *Ibid.* p. 589.
[369] *Ibid.* p. 587.
[370] *Ibid.* p. 589.

Interestingly, much of the article sets out to disprove the very existence of the abuses Trollope dramatizes, actively casts doubt on the 'facts' Trollope presents, and minimizes the severity of 'occasional brutality' in manufacturing.[371] But the real issue here is that Trollope is inappropriately using the novel and its reach to make controversial claims about public affairs. The 'allowances' made for 'a woman's sympathies' is a sexist rejection of the form of the novel (for its availability and appeal), of the novel's content that casts the working class as victims, and of Frances Trollope as a mouthpiece for reformers. Furthermore, the inflammatory language of the review does more to incite and inform negative reactions against the novel, than it does summarise the novel's actual language. This parallel between the imagined effects of novel-reading on an 'ignorant', 'excited' and 'heated' reading public made up of working men and the force of the reactionary response in the periodical evidences some genuine anxiety about the tangible results of novel-reading. However, this anxiety is part of a larger system of class relations that regarded the working-class as uncritical vehicles of extreme unsocial emotions, and the male middle-class (readers of the *Athenaeum* among them,) as impartial spectators whose role it was to tamp down on violent passions by introducing logical distance. Also, it is worth remarking on the material effects that the periodical review had on *Michael Armstrong*; while not fully 'consigned to oblivion' as hoped for by the *Bolton Free Press*, 'it never became one of the more popular among [France's Trollope's] novels'.[372] More than this, there is good reason to believe that the severity of the critical response to the novel caused Trollope to cut short her plans for Michael's story.

In a preface to the single volume edition of *Michael Armstrong* published by Colburn in 1844, Trollope intimated that she had originally planned a second volume that would follow Michael into adulthood 'embarked in those perfectly constitutional struggles for the amelioration of the sufferings of his class', but it is clear from the last number of the first (and only) volume

---

[371] *Ibid.* p. 587.
[372] Thomas Adolphus Trollope, *What I Remember, in Two Volumes*, (London: Bentley and Son, 1887), p. 8.

that Trollope had already abandoned this plan by February of 1840.[373] The preface offers some

tantalizing clues about how the second volume was meant to progress, and so in the final section

of this chapter I will read the preface in context of the ending of *Michael Armstrong* as we do have

it, but this was not included in the original serial publication.

But it is not only the negative responses to *Michael Armstrong* that may have caused

Trollope to give the story up. From the appearance of its first monthly number, *Michael Armstrong*

had attracted attention and approbation in some Chartist newspapers. One such lengthy review

in *Cleave's Penny Gazette* stated:

We are glad, therefore, to see this hateful system exposed by the caustic pen of Mrs Trollope, who, with many and great failings as a writer, is perhaps, better calculated than any person to lay bare the atrocities perpetuated by these prisons. Fictitious personages are, perhaps, best adapted to bring the factory system full home to the hearts of the British people; for "*Example draws when precept fails, | And sermons are less read than tales*".[374]

Here, too, the belief in fiction's further reach and greater influence on the public than non-

fiction is apparent. Notwithstanding any criticism of Trollope's failings (which are apparently too

numerous to warrant discussion), *Cleave's Penny Gazette* comes down in full support of Trollope's

message and of her medium. Indeed, this review emphasises the emotive influence of the novel,

writing that fiction is better calculated to 'bring home' (a phrase also used by Smith in the *Moral*

Sentiments) the realities of the system.[375] And unlike the *Athenaeum* review, which clearly prioritises

a right understanding of political economy over the personal, *Cleave's* review argues that

'fictitious personages' add necessary interest to Trollope's argument.

The review in *Cleave's Penny Gazette* is also interesting for its use of emotive language

designed to mirror the severity of the problem that the novel deals with. Where the *Athenaeum*

criticised the 'violent' emotion that was the result of Trollope's misplaced 'sympathies', this

---

[373] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, p. iii.
[374] *Cleave's Penny Gazette of Variety*, (London, 23 March 1839), no 24, p. 2.
[375] Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, p. 30.

reviewer adds more detail in more evocative terms. For example, this review opens by making the provocative claim,

Of all descriptions of slavery that ever existed in the world, there is none, taking every circumstance into account, so hideous as that engendered in the factories of England [...] the bulk of people in this country, free as they are said to be, are in every respect, except in name slaves.[376]

In the early nineteenth century, it was common for industrial reformers to draw direct (and problematic) comparisons between the actual chattel slavery of Africans and their descendants on-going in the United States and the wage slavery of white urban England. This continued long after the slave trade was abolished in England in 1807, and slave ownership was fully abolished in 1833.[377] The same language and arguments used by abolitionists were regularly rehashed and reworked into the debate about the factory system, increasing fervour and outrage with mill-owners and their overseers for their treatment of white British citizens. But this line of argument wasn't only being employed by radicals like John Cleave, and the language that explicitly compared the experience of factory workers to that of slaves was used in *Michael Armstrong*.

When Mary Brotherton visits Parson Bell as part of her search for answers, he tells her in no uncertain terms about the cruelty of the factory system: 'in no other situation, excepting that of slaves purchased and paid for like an ox, or an ass, is the destiny of a human being placed so wholly beyond the reach of his own control'.[378] And nearly fifteen years later this comparison was still being uncritically used, most famously in John C Cobden's *The White Slaves of England* (1853), which actually drew some of the evidence for its claims about the poor treatment of British industrial workers from novels. In fact, Cobden specifically cited the description of Carson's mill in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* in his chapter 'Slavery in the British Factories',

---

[376] *Cleave's Penny Gazette*, (24 March 1839), p. 2.
[377] The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, it should be noted, did not free slaves in any of the territories held by the East India Company.
[378] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, p. 282.

even though John Barton only makes this subjective comparison very early on in the novel, and this view is not long upheld.[379] What is interesting about Cobden's book is the way that it uses descriptions from novels as evidence of the truth its own claims; more than that, in using fiction to generate a new work of non-fiction, Cobden's book effectively erases the imaginative qualities of *Michael Armstrong* and *Mary Barton* both, and produces a new set of 'facts' about the working class. This is very different from the way that fictional representations of working people are challenged in the *Athenaeum*.

In another inversion, Cobden's book essentially reproduced one of Auguste Hervieu's most famous illustrations from *Michael Armstrong*; Hervieu's version, titled 'Love Conquered Fear' depicts Michael and Edward (Michael's crippled older brother) embracing in the mill. They stand framed between the mule (a large piece of spinning equipment) on one side and some female hands watching their reunion on the other. Sir Matthew, identifiable by his top hat, presides over the scene from the background. The illustration by Harold Piffard in *White Slaves of England* uses the exact same frame including the mule on the left-hand side, the female operatives in the same pose on the right-hand side, and the top-hatted gentleman in the background. However, the focus of the scene is significantly changed. Rather than two brothers embracing, Piffard's version shows a single boy raising his arm in defence against the whip of the overseer. This is clearly designed to provoke an emotional response in the viewer, just as Hervieu's 'Love Conquered Fear' was; but where Hervieu's illustration elicits pathos for the embracing children, Piffard's elicits horror as was typical in depictions of slavery.

When it comes to the public perception of Frances Trollope the novelist going into *Michael Armstrong,* I am not the first to remark on the impact *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* had on her reputation. Indeed, many have addressed the curious consistency between these two novels, especially when it comes to the ultimate retreat to Germany to escape seemingly unresolvable

---

[379] John C Cobden, *The White Slaves of England, with Twelve Spirited Illustrations*, (Auburn and Buffalo: Miller Orton and Mulligan, 1854), p. 107.

social problems. In *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* Germany is symbolic of the civilized and cosmopolitan Old Word that is contrasted against the barbarous mercantile New World. In *Michael Armstrong* Mary's removal to Germany symbolizes the disavowal of the source of her wealth. But in both cases Germany represents a pastoral ideal, unmarred by human abuses disguised as economic principles. Initially, this retreat from industrial England appears to prefigure what Williams calls the 'devastating' conclusion of *Mary Barton*, but we know that the final published number was not the novel's intended end.[380] Jonathan Jefferson also has much in common with Sir Matthew Dowling, including an interesting symmetry in their death scenes. Mary's status as a failed interventionist likewise seems to rehash the futility of the Steinmark-Bligh alliance. And *Michael Armstrong* was being thematically connected to *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* before it was even published. One advertisement in the 10 February 1839 issue of *John Bull*, for example, explicitly portrayed Trollope's new novel as the natural continuation of her abolitionist sentiments, writing, 'we have heard that it is her intention to lend the whole power of her vigorous pen to the great object of *the emancipation of our white negroes*' [original emphasis].[381] The advertisement praises this choice of subject matter, endorses Trollope's abilities as a novelist and the transcendent ability of art objects to translate prose fiction into material punishment. It goes on to claim,

the lash of her satire has already been felt by the slave owner on the other side of the Atlantic, and if her pen be wielded with similar ability on the present occasion, her subject is one which will ensure to her the most eager attention from many thousands of her countrymen.[382]

What I find most interesting about this advert is the publisher's insistence that the force of Trollop's satire in *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* could, and even *had*, produced a material effect on the slaveholders it was directed against. Where 'the lash' had been a common metonymic stand-in

---

[380] Williams, p. 103.

[381] 'New Readerships', *John Bull*, (London, 10 February 1839), no. 948, p. 62.

[382] *Ibid.* p. 62.

for the practice of slave-holding, the metaphor that joins Trollope's pen to 'the lash' is a productive one because it demonstrates a belief in the power of novels (and of novelists) to rebound some of the worst abuses of slaveholders back onto them. In this formulation novels play a vital role in rectifying the social problems they represent; it isn't just that they expose the conditions endured by vulnerable people, but that they can visit allegorical retribution upon them. In effect, the novel's satire is a figurative violent act that renders unnecessary any real violent reckoning from the victims of abusive social practices. And its clear that it wasn't just Frances Trollope and her publisher Henry Colburn that felt this way. After a trip to Manchester where he claimed to have toured some of the best and worst cotton factories, Charles Dickens corresponded with reformer Lord Shaftesbury on what he saw. Dickens wrote 'I mean to strike the heaviest blow in my power for these unfortunate creatures, but whether I shall do so in the "Nickelby" or wait for some other opportunity, I have not yet determined'.[383] Of course, conflict with *Michael Armstrong* meant that Dickens did not use *Nickleby* to critique the industrial system, and that he wouldn't write an industrial novel at all until *Hard Times* in 1854. Still, Dickens's letter to Shaftesbury, coupled with Shaftesbury's anticipation of Dickens's help gives credence to the idea that the novel had material influence, and that novelists had an antagonistic relationship with economists.

(II) Martha, Mary and Matthew; The Limits of Artistic Inventions

In many ways, Mary Brotherton is both the novel's central protagonist and a model of the ideal novelist. Her pursuit of the truth that belies the factory system and journey to rescue Michael from his apprenticeship take up roughly half of the novel's space and narrative energy. Mary's activity on behalf of Michael also parallels Trollope's staging of the novel's construction which

[383] Letter to Lord Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 19 December 1838, *Letters of Charles Dickens*, p. 484.

she articulates in the preface, and her eldest son Thomas Adolphus corroborates in his autobiography.[384] Both Mary and Trollope are portrayed as women determined to overcome their own ignorance, accompanied by a chaperone, demanding, and occasionally bribing their way into some of the most notorious mills in Derbyshire in order to bear witness to the unadulterated realities of England's reliance on infant labour. While Mary is only briefly introduced in the second chapter as 'the richest young lady in the company', she becomes central to the novel's plot shortly after Michael's adoption, and is positioned as Sir Matthew's ideological foil.

Mary's financial independence has much to do with her ability to resist Sir Matthew. She is the only lady in the neighbourhood without a debt, perceived or otherwise to Sir Matthew— for example, Lady Clarissa and Mrs Gabberly both rely on Dowling's wealth (and carriages) to confer them additional consequence, and so he is able to use the literal voices of both women to amplify stories of his own merits. Worse than that, Dowling knowingly metes out small amounts of affection for his most dutiful daughter Martha, and lavishes attention on his other selfish children because this ensures Martha is compliant and eager to please him. Mary also refuses to be intimidated out of paying a visit to Michael's mother when Dowling stops and forcibly enters her carriage, 'stepp[ing] in with the assumed air of a partially loved friend, who knows that no leave need be asked'.[385] Sir Matthew has designs to marry off his eldest son to Mary and bring her vast fortune under his control, but Mary need not be privy to his plans in order to be repulsed by his lack of social grace and basic manners. If Sir Matthew is established as the novel's villain, Mary's wholly contrasting nature and means to defy him positions her, and not Michael, as the novel's hero.

Moreover, when Mary's background is fully introduced in chapter nine, it is a formal mirror of the introduction to Dowling in the first chapter. Both begin with descriptions of the

---

[384] T A Trollope, p. 7.
[385] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, p. 125.

house, which are used to draw conclusions about the taste and character of the owner. A tongue-in-cheek description of Dowling Lodge declares it is a 'princely mansion' decorated 'in a spirit of emulative imitation'.[386] Mary's home, by contrast, 'although less splendid in eternal appearance than that of Sir Matthew Dowling, was quite as elaborately elegant in its interior, and moreover, incomparably superior in every point in which taste was concerned'.[387] The comparison is telling, for it reveals where these characters fall in the novel's moral hierarchy. Firstly, while the appearance of Dowling Lodge conveys wealth, it is only of a style which confirms Dowling's coarseness and betrays his façade. External signs of wealth conceal Dowling's moral bankruptcy to all but the novel's readers, who have already seen his real treatment of Michael. Likewise, Dowling's constant touting of economic principles and known facts about the poor demonstrate that his belief that all human relationships boil down to issues of exchange; as a result, Dowling maintains his position in the neighbourhood through the promise of disseminating his wealth and the threat of withholding it, both encapsulated in the gap between the appearance of the mansion and the discomfort that it houses. Thus, Sir Matthew's wealth is not just a result of his exploitative business practices, or a tool of social control that authorizes his opinions, but a means of concealing his own deficiencies, which are otherwise obvious. That being said, Sir Matthew's villainy is made so clear throughout the novel that it offers no chance for redemption or reformation by the novel's conclusion. I want to suggest that Trollope treats the manufacturers in *Michael Armstrong* as she does the slaveholders in *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw*, as irredeemable proponents of an incurable system. For this reason, the bulk of the novel is not as concerned with righting the wrongs of Sir Matthew's philosophy as it is with rebuking the gullibility of the middle-class ladies who believe him.

Sir Matthew makes several efforts to publicise and authorise his version of Michael's adoption. First, he takes the boy with his on visits around the neighbourhood, but when he's

---

[386] *Ibid.* p. 2.
[387] *Ibid.* p.84.

exhausted his reach that way, he extends the story by sending an anonymous article detailing the affair to the county newspaper. He writes an article modestly titled 'English Benevolence' in a 'feigned hand, the wax being stamped with the handle of the seal instead of his arms,' all in a poor attempt to obfuscate his authorship.[388] In this retelling, Sir Matthew is the principal character and his adoption of Michael the primary act of heroism, while 'the boy' in question is not named at all. In fact, not much is said about Michael or his actual family except that they are 'peculiarly eligible as objects of charity'; he is literally consigned to the margins of Sir Matthew's article.[389] Moreover, the article opens with a declaration nearly identical to the genuine reactions in opposition to the novel unironically made in both the *Bolton Free Press* and the *Athenaeum*: 'there is, perhaps, no class of men so cruelly misrepresented as the manufactures of Great Britain'.[390] Given Trollope's reputation for 'caustic', lashing satire, Sir Matthew's cry of ill-treatment is a covert indication that manufactures do have the power to dictate the contemporary dialogue about industrialisation.

Through Sir Matthew's article, Trollope comments on the problems with how the periodical press makes claims to authentic knowledge about both economic facts and the condition of the poor, particularly in the case of disguised authorship. While Dowling conceals his identity, the language and trappings of his letter, especially the wax seal, convey all the signals of authority and privilege which visually give credence to his claims; readers of the newspaper are taken in, while the readers of the novel have sufficient perspective and independence from Dowling to draw a more accurate conclusion. By including the entire article, Trollope effectively casts doubt on the veracity of everything the reading public simply accepts about the conditions of industrialisation, and this might speak to the vitriol that the novel faced in the press, more than the taint of Chartist approbation alone. Instead of the journalist, the novel and novelist are positioned as the disinterested caretakers of disregarded labourers and of the truth about the

---

[388] *Ibid.* p. 45.
[389] *Ibid.* p. 45.
[390] *Ibid.* p. 45.

factory system more broadly. Mary Brotherton, the novel's moral centre, refuses to accept

Dowling's version of events, conducts her own independent research into the factory system,

and even attempts to disseminate her findings amongst her middle-class female companions;

thus, Mary performs the role of novelist. However, as I noted above the most sinister aspect of

the article is that Michael's condition is barely alluded to; he is a minor character in the epic of

Sir Matthew's goodness. It is unfortunate then, that the novel is unable to right this wrong and

afford Michael, or any of its working-class operatives, fully-fledged personhood.

Up to and including Michael's apprenticeship at Deep Valley Mill—about a third of the

way through the novel—Michael's story is buffeted and bookended by the cruel plotting of Sir

Matthew. In a third attempt to galvanize his own reputation, Dowling hijacks another medium to

circulate the story of Michael's adoption. He commissions a play titled '*Gratitude and Goodness*', in

which all of the principal characters will be played by themselves.[391] As expected, the play takes

every opportunity to imbue the scene with drama, and again the reader's foreknowledge of the

event amounts to dramatic irony when the tableau with the cow arrives. In front of the audience

the risk is inflated to the point of hilarity when Michael is 'commanded' to 'exaggerate […] the

manoeuvres necessary in turning the cow' as if it were a 'dreaded monster' or 'dragon'.[392] The

title initially seems a simple construction designed to reference Sir Matthew's gratitude (in the

form of the adoption) for Michael's goodness (his intervention with the cow), but the content of

the play upends this framework forcing Michael to perform gratitude for Sir Matthew's

goodness. As in the case of 'English Benevolence', the 'dumb show' Michael performs and the

dialogue he speaks are the creations of Sir Matthew, who has the authority to demand Michael *act*

in accordance with the narrative he wishes to deliver. Because Dowling, Lady Clarissa and the

great and good of Ashleigh expect Michael's gratitude for their condescension, the speech

imposed on him is a saccharine exultation of Sir Matthew's 'worth'. Moreover, Sir Matthew

---

[391] *Ibid.* p. 103.
[392] *Ibid.* pp. 103-04.

includes the direction that Michael deliver this speech with 'a tender, but joyous smile'.[393] But Michael is a child labourer, not an actor; he cannot commit fully to the artifice and his real emotions show through in the scene. Where Dowling expected gratitude and joy, indeed, where he wrote those feelings into existence, Michael's 'countenance expressed nothing but terror' that only Mary is able to perceive.[394]

The comic irony of Sir Matthew's rewriting comes at the expense of the tragedy of Michael's life. Ultimately, master and man are not subject to the same vagaries of fate, as the *Bolton Free Press* suggests, and even when both are confronted by the cow, Michael's goodness never shifts the power imbalance in his favour. Indeed, Michael is only ever declared the agent of their rescue because Lady Clarissa chooses to read the cow as dangerous, and in rehearsing the scene with increasingly contrived dramatics, Michael remains subject to the whims of both Dowling and Lady Clarissa long after the moment of salvation. The over-arching effect of the play is that it exposed the methods through which the ruling class reinforces its power, ventriloquizing its own desires through the coerced voice of the proletariat. By forcing the factory boy to play himself in Dowling's drama, Sir Matthew makes it appear that he allows Michael to speak on his own terms. It is only Mary and the reader that realize the words come from Dowling himself. In an Althusserian turn, the play, as all cultural artefacts must, camouflages Dowling's omnipotence, presenting him as one of many actors unaffectedly performing his role, while Michael is deployed as the mouthpiece that authorises, not his own story, but a refraction of Sir Matthew's. Through artistic production the ruling class generates accepted behavioural standards for the working class, and continuously reinforces the gulf between what the deserving poor ought to feel (grateful), and what the underserving poor do feel (terrified). This results in the naturalised position of the benevolent caretaker relative to the artless working class.

---

[393] *Ibid.* p. 104.
[394] *Ibid.* p. 104.

Mary's venture, literally, behind-the-scenes of the play, at once confirms her critical relationship to Dowling, at the same time that it complicates the imagined role of the novelist. Offering up Mary's journey and judgement as the corrective antithesis to Sir Matthew reveals the outer limits of the novel's ability to intervene. Even while *Michael Armstrong* is critical of clearly biased representations of the working class, and of the 'ordinary modes' of middle-class interventionism, representation itself becomes its central weakness. In spite of Trollope's claims and the 'cheap form of publication' the novel is a bourgeois enterprise, presenting only an approximate likeness of the imagined working class, albeit a more humane version than Sir Matthew's. Where Dowling is a device, a voice, deployed by Trollope to expose industry's attempted approbation of cultural objects to legitimise its own authority, Mary is the mechanism through which Trollope asserts the rights of the novelist to authorise cultural production and societal standards. In the play and in most of the novel, Michael plays the role of the sympathetic factory child, while the adults around him spar to establish the genuine version of his experience.

Before the scheduled performance, Mary is offered a role in the play even though she had nothing to do with the event in question. This is likely another attempt on Dowling's part to throw her together with his eldest son.[395] Mary's refusal to take part functionally confirms her moral superiority to Dowling in much the same way that Fanny Price's refusal to perform in *Lover's Vows* serves this purpose in Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814). Additionally, this refusal, combined with Mary's social and financial independence from Sir Matthew, discussed above, leaves her free to play the role of witness and impartial judge. In contrast, Martha, the eager, if flawed, moral centre within the Dowling household is deliberately excluded from participating in the play. Unlike Fanny's passive resistance to the sexual licentiousness the play is adopted to mask (for she is never truly expected to take part), the unrelenting exclusion of Martha from family life eventually overrides her ability to evaluate their moral failings. Though both Mary and

---

[395] *Ibid.* p. 94.

Martha share concern for Michael's well-being and watch the play together, Martha's dependence on her father's withheld affections render her, at best, an impotent observer of Michael's abuse, and at worst, an accessory to its continuance.

When Mary draws Martha's attention to Michael's expression of terror during his 'grateful' speech, Martha is unable to read his condition. She reasons 'the novelty of his situation' must be the cause of his distress, reinterpreting this aberrant behaviour so it is consistent with Sir Matthew's narrative, rather than contradictory.'[396] All of this occurs despite the fact that Martha is the only member of the Dowling household to converse regularly with Michael; he tells her explicitly that he wishes to return to his mother, and even that he is still being starved while living at Dowling Lodge. According to Constance Harsh, 'the novel indicts Martha Dowling's ineffectual kindness' because she fails to materially 'aid Michael within the framework provided by her father's authority over the household […] Martha is an insufficient character because of her subservience to a father who ought to be rebelled against'. [397] And by the end of the novel Martha's 'ineffectual kindnesses' has been well and truly punished. She realizes, too late, the conditions under which Michael suffers, and her guilt reproduces what she imagines his experience to be on her own body. When they meet again as adults, Martha is 'too much altered for [Michael] to recognize her in any degree' having grown 'greatly thinner, and so delicately pale, that her appearance was rather a contrast than a resemblance to what he expected to meet'. [398] Thus, as Michael starves and turns sickly, Martha thins and contracts a look of 'ill-health'.[399]

What is most interesting about Martha's embodiment of Michael's sufferings is that her imagined entrance into Michael's circumstances does not culminate in a sympathy of 'secondary passions' as Smith suggests it should do.[400] When Martha finally becomes aware of Michael's

---

[396] *Ibid.* p. 104.
[397] Constance Harsh, *Subversive Heroines: Feminist Resolutions of Social Crisis in the Condition-of-England Novel*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 40-41.
[398] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, p. 337.
[399] *Ibid.* p. 337.
[400] Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, p. 35.

hunger and sickness, she does not merely experience the sympathetic transfer of his distress, but the wholesale transmission of the physical effects of his real condition. Because Martha never does anything with the knowledge that Michael suffers, her ethical position relative to her father ensures that she also suffers more than her father. These are the results of kindness unaccompanied by 'labour, pains or self-denial'.[401] Martha's sympathy with Michael, then, is also the lash by which she is punished.

During the play it is, of course, Mary's intuition that the scene justifies when Michael begins to cry on stage. She, too, indicts Martha's refusal to recognize this as evidence of her father's malice, demanding 'do you feel quite satisfied, my dear, that this romantic adventure has been, or will be advantageous to him?'.[402] The purpose of this question goes beyond simply rebuking Martha's negligence in thoughtlessly subscribing to her father's narrative. Mary forcefully condemns not only the fancifully reductive play, but the adoption itself as a romantic misadventure, the only result of which will injure Michael. Mary disputes not only the validity of representations that rescue the poor, but also whether such acts would be materially beneficial to them. In voicing this question, Trollope effectively subverts the very genre conventions that Dickens accused her of copying, and the first half of the novel continues to expose and disrupt these romantic tropes. But the novel can't sustain this subversion indefinitely, and in elevating Mary's role from impartial observer to rescuer, Trollope ultimately concedes to the formal pressure of the romance plot. And while Mary is 'incomparably' Dowling's 'superior', employing her energy and fortune in pursuit of Michael, once Michael is shipped off to Deep Valley Mill, her story displaces his even more completely than Sir Matthew's did. From then on, the narrative oscillates back and forth between the infant labourer and his would-be rescuer, until Michael's apparent death when he disappears fully for five chapters.

---

[401] Smiles, p. vi.
[402] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, p. 106.

Making matters more complicated still is Mary's unofficial adoption of Fanny Fletcher and Edward Armstrong. This is one of the limited acts of kindness Parson Bell recommends for the relief of Mary's *own* heart 'from the palsy of hopeless and helpless pity'. Uncomfortably in line with Dowling's use of Michael to satisfy his own desire for public approbation, Mary's performance as saviour indulges her desire to feel useful. In this way, Parson Bell's scepticism about the effectiveness of middle-class sympathy presents the novel's inherent tensions in miniature. Though they might be inclined to intercede on behalf of the working class, attempting to do so merely soothes middle-class discomfort while critically undermining the agency of the working class.

(III) Resolutions: Not Quite Radical

To round off my reading of *Michael Armstrong* I want to consider the resolutions it offers, given it has expressed so little confidence in interventionist reform up to this point. When Michael finally gains a measure of safety and stability, having escaped Deep Valley Mill and working for a time as a shepherd in the healthful outdoors, he requests leave from his employer to visit Ashleigh and search for his family. There, he encounters his old nemeses, Parsons and Sir Matthew Dowling, the latter of whom is dying, abandoned by his wife and children, in debt and in shame. Martha Dowling, his long-suffering daughter, and the only child that loves him, describes the extent of Sir Matthew's affliction to Michael, begging him to remain in Ashleigh until her father's death. Martha tells him

There has been a great alteration in him. His memory has failed him, and at times his temper has been so variable that I have seen him violently angry, and very intemperate in his language, one minute, and enduring the insolence of Lady Clarissa, with the meekness of a child the next […] I greatly fear that his reason is shaken. He has kept all his commercial disasters so completely to himself, that not even his most confidential agents were at all aware of their extent.[403]

---

[403] *Ibid.* pp. 346-47.

Of course, attentive readers will have recognized the irony in Martha's concerns for her father, recalling the conflicting 'intemperate language' privately directed at Michael, and his public attempts to court the good opinion of his neighbourhood, and Lady Clarissa's most of all. The impulse to conceal the disconnect between Sir Matthew's real feelings toward the working class and his publicly declared opinions illustrates his awareness of the unacceptability of those feelings. In fact, his attempt to hide his contempt for Michael and the other children employed in his mill, betrays Dowling's recognition that this contempt would repel the ladies of Ashleigh and wider England, despite his private conviction that these feelings are justified. This concealment of his failings comes to be expressed in his business practices as well, contributing to the sudden plummet of his fortune and consequence, and leaving no opportunity for retrenchment. Thus, it is not Dowling's sudden temper or use of intemperate language that evidences the severity of his condition, rather his inability to continue the ruse that is.

In addition to madness and financial ruin, Sir Matthew is meted out another form of domestic punishment in the person of his shrewish second wife, Lady Clarissa. Of the match, Martha confesses, his marriage to Lady Clarissa […] has been a greater misfortune to him, Michael, than any losses in business could possibly be'.[404] Even in social and financial disgrace, Dowling's greatest 'misfortune' is his pretentious wife, who all along has been symbolic of his misplaced 'reverence for rank and title'.[405] In this way, *Michael Armstrong* resists completely the language of natural hierarchies and real aristocrats that is central to both Carlyle's and Disraeli's resolution. Where negative reviews of *Michael Armstrong* in the *Bolton Free Press* and in the *Athenaeum* explicitly argued that the interests of landownership were united to the interests of manufacturing, and that both parties were the 'blameless' victims of reformer's rhetoric, Trollope's view of the situation entirely different. In the world of the novel neither the

---

[404] *Ibid.* p. 347.
[405] *Ibid.* p. 347.

aristocracy nor the middle class is without blame, and the fall of Sir Matthew Dowling serves to illustrate the fundamentally divided interests of these two groups.

Unlike Egremont, Lady Clarissa has no interest in interceding on behalf of industrial labourers in any serious way. The part she plays in facilitating Michael's adoption, and in manufacturing the 'tremendous danger' posed by the cow is indicative of her treatment of social inferiors as opportunities for amusement.[406] Lady Clarissa literally plays upon both Michael and Sir Matthew when she deliberately misunderstands the latter's offer of a sixpence as a joke:

"Sixpence!" cried her ladyship, turning extremely red,—but in a moment she recovered herself and she said: "Oh! Sir Matthew! Do I not know how dearly you love a jest? Men of wit and humour can rarely be grave for so long together, even under circumstances that most keenly touch their feelings; did I not know you well, my friend, what should I not think of your proposal?"[407]

Clarissa's blush—whether from embarrassment or anger that Sir Matthew interprets the service afforded to her person to be of so little value—is supplanted by her decided reinterpretation of Sir Matthew's reaction. This has much the same effect as the play does in generating an appropriate voice for Michael, wherein Sir Matthew's prejudices against Michael are not changed by Lady Clarissa's declarations, but they are silenced. Following Lady Clarissa's vehement amusement, Sir Matthew is only inwardly indignant—'confound you and the beggar's brat together, you old fool'—he thinks, but he does not speak.[408] Moreover, it is impossible for Dowling to make his real feelings known. This ventriloquy only works in one direction, the aristocracy can dictate on behalf of middle- and working-class voices, but the middle class cannot presume to dictate the feelings or actions of the aristocracy. When Lady Clarissa makes plain her plan to have Michael taken home with them, Sir Matthew responds with an affected

---

[406] *Ibid.* p. 15.
[407] *Ibid.* p. 15.
[408] *Ibid.* p. 17.

misunderstanding that repeats Lady Clarissa's: 'to your cottage, my dear lady?'.[409] But her rank

(and Sir Matthew's deference to it) allows her to set the terms of the Shrimpton-Dowling

relationship. Lady Clarissa cannot be entrapped by the same rhetorical techniques that she wields

herself. For all that the novel ridicules her foolishness, Lady Clarissa is essential in forcing the

action of the plot and her final abandonment of Sir Matthew underscores the novel's assertion

that the aristocracy are not beholden to the lower classes by financial ties or principles. Rather,

the hitching of the aspirational middle class to the lesser aristocracy serves only as a temporary

buoy to a mode of social organization that is failing nevertheless.

Despite Martha's fear that the illness has affected her father's wits, causing him to behave

uncharacteristically, really the illness negates Dowling's need for pretence, and his relationship

with Lady Clarissa suffers accordingly. He is finally openly critical of her airs, of Doctor

Crockley's schemes and of Mrs Gabberly's gossip-mongering and uses the art of contrived

misunderstanding to make them all appear foolish. For example, he asks Mrs Gabberly to fetch

Lady Clarissa to his bedside by saying, 'go to my Lady Clarissa, if you please, sweet Mrs Gabberly

[…] I wish before we part to give her a parting token of remembrance. She knows I wear a

magnificent diamond ring, and you may hint to her […] if you please that nothing has been taken

off my body yet'.[410] Mrs Gabberly, however, misses the uncouth implication of Dowling's

summons and passes it on. Unsurprisingly, Lady Clarissa refuses the demand to present at her

husband's bedside. That is, she refuses until the ring is mentioned when 'the effect of these

words was as sudden as that produced by the magic touch of a hand employed in turning off

gas'.[411] Only on his death bed is Dowling able to manipulate language efficiently enough to best

Lady Clarissa. He does not surrender the ring, but in successfully summoning her only by its

invocation, he deliberately exposes Lady Clarissa, and her so-called 'Christian spirit' to Mrs

---

[409] *Ibid.* p. 17.
[410] *Ibid.* p. 351.
[411] *Ibid.* p. 353.

Gabberly.[412] Dowling knows he is beyond caring for the worldly opinions of his neighbourhood now that he is on the verge of death, but deals this final blow to Lady Clarissa's inflated consequence, not by commanding her own speech, but in a vindictive masterstroke that governs the way she will be talked *about*.

Finally, when Sir Matthew recognizes Michael as one of the watchers at his deathbed, his reaction is the antithesis of the romantic tableau that closes the relationship between master and man in *Mary Barton*. Where Carson cradles and forgives the dying John Barton for the murder of his son, in the first moment of recognition, Dowling insults Michael, calling him a 'devil,' 'demon' and 'hell-bird', marked by his 'd—d hypocritical eyes' and 'hateful curly hair'.[413] Not only does he recognize Michael after so much time has passed, but even as his mind deteriorates, Sir Matthew deduces that Michael is a runaway. And while Dowling likens Michael to devils and demons, his illness is not so far progressed that he actually mistakes Michael for these supernatural beings. In commenting on Michael's eyes and hair, Dowling perceives the human features which age and education have not changed. However, as Dowling's illness worsens over the following chapters, in a wild fit he can only recognize the former factory boy for a moment before his imagination is overrun by macabre illusions. Dowling sees the ghostly forms of other children injured in his mill clambering around his bed, from whom he recoils, raving,

There is a dead body walking about the room! [...] He is come for me! [...]Take them!—take them away from me I tell you! They are all dirty, beastly factory-children. Their arms and legs are all broken and smashed, and hanging by bits of skin […] Their horrid joints will drop upon me! They are dangling loose I tell you![414]

Moments before death Dowling no longer recognizes Michael as an escaped, adult version of the factory child he knew. Instead, Dowling recoils from him as a dead body, or rather, a body that should have been made dead, either in the factory, or during the escape. Even in this moment,

---

[412] *Ibid.* p. 354.
[413] *Ibid.* p. 355.
[414] *Ibid.* p. 364.

thrust amongst the spectres of children killed and maimed in his factory, Dowling is incapable of

repentance and is instead repulsed by the imagined bodies. His refusal to acknowledge their

reality in life has ensured that they will haunt him at the moment of his death when his diseased

mind can no longer reject their existence. Tellingly, Dowling's fear stems from the possibility

that the children, and their mutilated limbs 'hanging by bits of skin' will touch him. He does not

fear any greater repercussions in the afterlife, and even being aware that death is imminent, he is

still repulsed by the physicality of the 'dirty, beastly factory children.'

This scene anticipates the similar ghastly encounter of Scrooge with the children,

'Ignorance and Want', in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Immediately before facing what

Scrooge will come to realize is his own death, the two children are brought out from beneath the

robe of the Spirit of Christmas Present.[415] They are similarly, if less explicitly, deformed to

Dowling's factory children, though they are more expressly demonized in Dickens's text: 'yellow,

meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish […] a stale and shrivelled hand […] had pulled them into

shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked and glared out menacing'.[416] These

children pose a more obvious threat to Scrooge than the grotesque bodies pose to Dowling.

Where Dowling's spectres are largely passive, his fear being that the bits of skin will give way and

the mangled limbs might simply fall upon him, the wolfishness of Ignorance and Want, the

devils lurking within them, and the terrifying adults they will grow to be, have the power to do

genuine harm. This runs counter to Dowling's description of Michael as devilish, and this

assertion is disproved within the text using the same terms as Dickens to express the threat

posed by Ignorance and Want. Michael's looks from childhood through adulthood are described

as angelic, and ironically the features Dowling finds most hateful, his eyes and cherubic curly

hair, are precisely those which confirm Michael's innocence.[417]

---

[415] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol, The Chimes and The Cricket on the Hearth,* ed. by Katherine Kroeber Wiley, (Barnes and Noble Classics, New York: 2004).
[416] Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 66.
[417] F. Trollope, p. 311

The essential difference between Dowling's and Scrooge's reaction to the children is in the way that the Spirit assigns blame. In response to Scrooge's query of who the children belong to, the Spirit replies, 'they are Man's,' but when Scrooge continues to question if there is relief available to them, the Spirit rebukes him by repeating his own miserly perspective back to him: 'are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?'.[418] In Dickens's story, written four years after *Michael Armstrong* was completed, responsibility for the condition of the poor is diversified, and in some respects diluted, by its attribution to all men. Trollope, on the other hand, does not portray greed as a generic human failing, but rather, as a failing which manufactures have a specific propensity toward. As a result, there is no room in *Michael Armstrong* for good millowners like *North and South*'s Mr Thornton, or *Sybil*'s Mr Trafford. Scrooge's night with the Spirits effects his sympathetic transformation (fully realized shortly after his introduction to Ignorance and Want), and it is through the medium of the ghostly encounter that Scrooge makes sense of his own role in perpetuating social problems that spans wider than simple poverty. In fact, Scrooge recognizes that he suffers from the same defects as the children; he is ignorant of the real conditions affecting the working class, and he is in want of sympathy. By this I mean not only that Scrooge must learn to sympathize with others, but also that he must become someone that others (like Ned's wife) can sympathize with. His experiences with the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet-to-Come, alleviate these precise failings. Scrooge is reminded of his own less fortunate youth, bears witness to the destitution of the Cratchits, is made to submit to his nephew's sympathy and, through the combination of these experiences, is fundamentally altered for the better.

 Sir Matthew Dowling, however, undergoes no such transformation. Even at the moment of his death, he expresses no consciousness of responsibility for the condition of the children haunting him, nor is he interested in seeking Michael's forgiveness. It would seem, then,

---

[418] Dickens, *A Christmas Carol,* p. 66.

that the novel's conclusion upholds Parson Bell's melancholy view that the problems associated

with infant labour and manufacturing cannot be solved from within the factory system, and that

the individualized charity of Mary (and Scrooge) simply eases middle-class guilt over benefitting

from this system they cannot make meaningful changes to. However, the novel does gesture to a

possible alternative to alleviating the condition of the working class that is not reliant merely on

the sympathetic awakening of manufacturers, or well-meaning ladies.

In the preface to the first volume edition of *Michael Armstrong* Trollope laid out her

original plan to complete the narrative with a second part detailing Michael's adult life,

'embarked in those perfectly constitutional struggles for the amelioration of the sufferings of his

class, in which many of the more enlightened operatives have been for some years engaged.'[419]

Initially, this preliminary forecast appears a straightforward endorsement of the rights of

working-class men to 'struggle' for improved working and living conditions. Indeed, Trollope's

support for the cause is underscored by her positive characterization of both the struggle itself as

'perfectly constitutional' and the struggling operatives as 'enlightened'.

Of course, this introduction is also a defence of her position against critics of the original

serialised publication. In spite of—or more likely, *because* of—this popularity among Chartist

agitators, a continuation of the narrative never appeared. Trollope explains her abandonment of

an account of Michael's adult life in the preface thus:

The author's views have undergone very considerable change. Knowing the immense amount of
evil to be remedied, and the urgent necessity, for many reasons, that this remedy should not be
delayed, it is grievous to see misguided and unfortunate men pursuing a course which must
necessarily neutralize the efforts of their true friends. When those in whose behalf she hoped to
move the sympathy of their country are found busy in scenes of outrage and lawless violence,
and uniting themselves with individuals whose doctrines are subversive of every species of social
order, the author feels that it would be alike acting in violation of her own principles, and doing
injury to the cause she wishes to serve, would she persist in an attempt to hold up as objects of
public sympathy, men who have stained their righteous cause with deeds of violence and blood
[…] The cause has been too much sullied, and the sufferers too closely associated to the public
eye with those who have been guilty of all she most deprecates, to permit her continuing the
work as she intended.[420]

---

[419] *Ibid.* p. iii.
[420] *Ibid.* pp. iii-iv.

Trollope writes that she cannot conscientiously produce a continuation of a narrative which would appear to support radical political activity, likely in light of a wave of increasingly violent Chartist demonstrations in Birmingham (1838), Newport (November 1839) and Bradford (January 1840), between the completion of the novel's serialisation and publication in volume form.[421] It is certainly common of publications within the Condition of England debate to denounce all violence perpetrated by the working classes, even as they demonstrate the necessity of addressing the suffering of industrial workers. However, Trollope's distancing from Michael's imagined future balks at the possible connection between upholding sympathetic objects and the potential for misreading this mere presentation as a total approbation of real action.

Throughout her life Frances Trollope continued to defend the observations presented within the novel as unequivocally true, a position also maintained by Thomas Adolphus in his memoir nearly five decades later, again responding to backlash which often accused Frances of making exaggerated claims in order to increase both public outrage and her own profits.[422] In her own words, Trollope prioritized the intellectual labour she had undergone as an author in writing the first, and only, volume of Michael's tale. She states that the purpose of illustrating his boyhood suffering is to 'drag into the light of day and place before the eyes of Englishmen' the truth of infant exploitation in the 'monster spinning mills'.[423] Similarly, in her reasoning for not continuing with a volume detailing Michael's adult life quoted above, Trollope refers to her attempts to both '*move* the sympathy of the public' and '*hold up* as objects of public sympathy' those 'righteously' struggling operatives she depicts (emphasis added).[424] In doing so, Trollope echoes the sentiments expressed in the first *John Bull* advertisement which praised the potency of her satire in *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw*. The activity of Trollope *dragging* out the truth in her novel has connotations of both the weightiness of the issue of child labour and of the resistance of

---

[421] John Walton, *Chartism*, (London: Francis & Taylor, 1999), pp. 16-18.
[422] T A Trollope, p. 8.
[423] F. Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, p. iii.
[424] *Ibid.* p. iv.

manufacturers to make this information public. She presents this in contrast with the less laborious implications of simply *placing* the novel into the hands and before the eyes of her readership. There is an inherent tension with which Trollope describes her project as author, which incorporates the apparent labour of research and construction characterized physically, with the passive experience of the reader. Her following descriptions of the machinations of narrative sympathy conform to this conception of a simple transmittance of authorial energy into public opinion. Reader sympathy for operatives is the natural and inevitable result of Trollope's efforts in depicting them. Thus, the real danger in what might appear to be Trollope's public support for the cause of industrial workers in *Michael Armstrong* is not that it encourages more disgruntled labourers to violence, but that it has the potential to make the general reading public sympathetic to any and all violent activity.

By 1840 Trollope is making an argument for the seriousness of the novel; she uses its popularity to increase the exposure of legitimately worrying trends in labour relationships and urban poverty, as well as its capacity for manipulating both sympathetic thought and tangible action. It is clear from this preface that she intended the deployment of sympathy in *Michael Armstrong* to function similarly to the lash of *Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw,* which is to say that the moral force of her fiction was intended to mitigate the need for more potentially destructive action. Having endeavoured in the first instance to move the sympathies of the public on behalf of infant labourers, Trollope must abandon this position not only by discontinuing her project, but with a complete disavowal of presenting industrial workers as potential sites for any kind of sympathetic identification. However, it is worth interrogating the context of Trollope's purported retreat, and how she directs readerly sympathy throughout the novel, especially after Michael's escape from Deep Valley Mill.

Having made a successful escape, and following an unsuccessful suicide attempt, Michael's transformation from child to adult takes place over the course of a page-break. No

longer stunted by hunger and labour, 'his mind seemed to awaken day by day'.[425] Thus begins

Michael's transformation from abused factory child into one of the 'enlightened operatives'

Trollope supports in the Preface.[426] On his return to Ashleigh, the adult Michael resolves to

attend a 'great Yorkshire meeting,' advertised as 'a wonderful and stirring spectacle' in support of

the Ten Hours Bill.[427] While reading over the hand-bills Michael is very conscious of how

different his circumstances have become from his factory days. But even though his lot has

vastly improved, he finds the language and promise of the handbill to be moving:

yet did his heart throb, and his eye kindle as he perused page after page of the arousing call

which summoned tens of thousands, nay hundreds of thousands to use the right the country

vested in them, of imploring mercy and justice from the august tripartite of power that ruled the

land.[428]

I want to point out how distinct the claims in the bills are from the clamours for the

vague 'rights of labour' of the Hell-Cats in *Sybil*. Most significantly, in Trollope's novel the

'rights' Michael and all operatives have access to are 'rights the country vested in them.' They are

not rights which need to be founded, or demanded, but which pre-exist their invocation, and are

natural to them as Englishmen. Where Disraeli's 'rights of labour' are a destabilizing and anti-

national influence, these rights are derived from the country itself, and pose no danger to it in

their exercise. Additionally, these rights are figured as the right to apply to the existing power

structures for relief, 'justice' and 'mercy,' rather than the altogether more radical claims to the

franchise, or other rights that have the power to materially transform the existing power

structure. It is also worth mentioning that this is the first scene in the novel that features Michael

reading. The hand-bill is communicative, and enlivens Michael mentally as well as physically. As

a written object it conveys information more precisely than the firebrand speeches of Stephen

---

[425] *Ibid.* p. 304.
[426] *Ibid.* p. iii.
[427] *Ibid.* p. 313.
[428] *Ibid.* p. 312.

Morely or Bishop Hatton. Furthermore, it is illiteracy which puts the labourers at Wodgate in the power of the Bishop to begin with, since they are not able to read even the Bible, he becomes the originator and enforcer of 'complete knowledge' amongst the Hell-Cats.[429] And it is partially this filtered, partial access to the rights of labour that proves fatal to the Hell-Cats.

In my concluding thoughts on *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong* I want to circle back to the gap between the novel's completed serialisation and its re-publication as a single volume. In so doing, I want to consider the proposed sequel and how we might use its absence to imagine a more satisfactory resolution to the Condition-of-England question. I want to suggest that Michael's participation in the great Yorkshire meeting is essential to the formation of his adult character as an 'enlightened operative.' It is this conscious political engagement which re-centres the action of the novel on Michael, finally displacing both Sir Matthew and Mary Brotherton, and affording him the liberal personhood denied him until this point.[430]

Though it seems Trollope intended to contain this political engagement in the ways I've pointed out above, I want to suggest the possibility for the wider breadth of working-class autonomy occasioned by the incomplete narrative. Her stated intention is that in the second volume, Michael should be 'seen embarked in those perfectly constitutional struggles for the amelioration of the sufferings of his class'.[431] Above, I noted how Trollope's 'perfectly constitutional' qualifiers legitimized both the demands of the campaigners and the justice of that campaign. But couching the right of the working class to make demands of the government within a constitutional framework that renders them otherwise impotent undercuts the real stakes in lending this support. The text still has some radical implications though, if only because a further volume does not exist to weaken them. In anticipation of the Yorkshire meeting a fellow traveller prepares Michael thusly:

---

[429] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 163
[430] Johnston, p. 4.
[431] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong*, p. iii.

A multitude, probably amounting to above a hundred overworked operatives, will meet in peace and good order, to petition for legal relief from the oppression of a system which has brought them to a lower state of degradation and misery than any to which human beings have ever been brought before. [432]

Again, the presence of positive qualifiers—'peace,' 'good order,' 'legal,'—signals to the reader the righteousness of this mode of 'imploring' relief from the factory system. To emphasize the justice of petitioning, even if it is in good order, the traveller mirrors this presentation with antonyms respecting the condition of workers—'oppression,' 'degradation,' and 'misery.' But the real stakes of this meeting are revealed in the following sentence, 'were those in whom poor people have confidence, less deeply anxious to preserve the public peace than they are, a different mode of redress might be sought for.'[433] This marks one of the few times *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong* acknowledges the autonomous potential of the working class. This potential carries with it the implicit threat of 'other modes of redress,' which are held in check by their confidence in achieving their cause.

The meeting itself is not detailed because the 'triumphant influence of reason and kindness' are 'already matters of history,' those figures 'anxious to preserve the public peace' apparently having won the day.[434] Thus, Trollope imagines a working-class gathering that is tractable, easily contained by reason, even when assembled in a 'hungry multitude' and with 'beer […] in the greatest abundance.'[435] There is some inherent tension in this apparently generous depiction. On one hand, it asserts that the working classes must be capable of exercising reason which clearly departs from Carlyle's 'wild inarticulate souls […] with inarticulate uproar like dumb creatures in pain.'[436] For the most part, the novel has worked to expose how systematic silencing and wilful misrepresentation of the working class are essential to creating the conditions for the dehumanizing exploitation of the manufacturers. However, I have to point

---

[432] *Ibid.* p. 314.
[433] *Ibid.* p. 314.
[434] *Ibid.* p. 314.
[435] *Ibid.* p. 314.
[436] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 6.

out that the demands of the Ten Hours Bill are not voiced by any member of the working class but explained by Parson Bell way back in chapter nineteen. On the other hand, this 'triumph of reason' suggests that the petitioners can only be celebrated so long as they make these demands within the discursive modes made available to them by dominant class. Here, reason is not proof of the artificiality of the systems which separate working-class operatives from middle-class interventionists, but an obstacle to self-determination. And in this we come up against the problems of novelistic incarnations of the working class, always already mediated by the position of the novelist; Trollope cannot think outside of her own historical moment. However, in the margins of the text the novel does gesture at, and at times attempts to reject the possibility that the working class can seize sovereignty. This happens in the ambiguity of 'the other modes of redress' which the traveller alludes to. 'Other modes' teeters on the edge of alarmist declaration, perhaps serving as a warning to the intended readership of the threat posed by the 'hungry multitude,' especially in light of the 'violence and blood' that precludes a second instalment; but this is uncertain.[437] I want to suggest that there is subversive possibility in this ambiguity, in the multiple 'other modes' that are outside of the scope of the bourgeois imagination. There is radical potential in the forecasting of Michael's continued struggles, only as long as those struggles remain unnamed and unwritten.

---

[437] Trollope, *Michael Armstrong,* p. iv.

A Righting of Wrongs; Rewriting Personal Contact in Elizabeth Gaskell's Industrial Novels[438]

It has become almost a tradition in Gaskell scholarship to introduce *North and South* (1855) as Elizabeth Gaskell's *second* industrial novel. This is, of course, objectively true, as *North and South* was published nearly seven years after its predecessor, *Mary Barton* (1848). But there is often more at work in this classification that tends to position *North and South* as both more stylistically refined and politically conservative than Gaskell's earlier work.[439] Raymond Williams, like he has so many times before in this study, typifies the classic interpretation of *North and South*'s position relative to *Mary Barton*: 'Mrs Gaskell's second industrial novel [...] is less interesting, because the tension is less'.[440] For Williams, the radical promise of the first half of *Mary Barton*, already unsustainable in that novel, fully gives way to the Victorian structure-of-feeling that meant the working class could be regarded as sympathetic objects, yes, but not as political subjects. Consequently, he finds that 'the emphasis of the novel [...] is almost entirely now on attitudes *to* the working people, rather than on the attempt to reach, imaginatively, their feelings about their lives' [original emphasis].[441]

This shift in emphasis is baked into the narrative structure of each novel; where *Mary Barton* prioritizes the experiences of working-class characters John and Mary, *North and South*'s representations of the industrial north are largely focalised through middle-class interventionist Margaret Hale's experience. The impulse to read *Mary Barton* as a radical text that centres working-class experience and desire for political self-determination has also been historically frustrated by that novel's structure. The novel is famously split into two halves, where the first half appears to take the Chartist John Barton as its protagonist, only to abandon him in the

---

[438] Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. by Patricia Ingham, (London, Penguin Books: 2003), p. 193.
[439] Elizabeth Gaskell wrote two other novels in the intervening years—*Cranford* (1851-53) and *Ruth* (1853)—neither of which deal explicitly with industrialism and are thus usually read in light of the other social issues they bring to light.
[440] Williams, p. 103.
[441] *Ibid.* p. 103.

second half. Following John's murder of Harry Carson—the son of a wealthy mill-owner—the novel is recentred on 'the less compromising figure of the daughter', Mary, and the marriage plot.[442] For Williams and others this disjoin has come to represent a redirection of novelistic sympathy: 'in committing the murder, [John] seems to put himself not only beyond the range of Mrs Gaskell's sympathy (which is understandable), but, more essentially, beyond the range of her powers' to represent.[443]

This 'notoriously problematic form' has long interested scholarship, and in recent years has prompted some critics to reassess the novel and iron out the wrinkle that appears to divide John's radicalism from the novel's romantic structure.[444] As I sketched in the introduction, this reassessment has largely been enabled by challenges to Nancy Armstrong's 'line of thinking' that 'insist[s] that the marriage plot converts political relations into sexual relations'.[445] In *Women and Domestic Experience* (2001) Susan Johnston notes the discursive gap embedded in this attitude, writing, 'such analyses, while taking as axiomatic the interdependence of public and private domains' continue to treat the realms of the 'intimate', 'domestic' and 'private' as fundamentally distinct from 'the public', even as they identify the ideological underpinnings of 'separate spheres that informed both nineteenth-century literature and political philosophy'.[446] Challenges like Johnston's, Michie's and Schaffer's have since demonstrated that traditionally romantic forms and the thematics of domesticity need not exchange, or discipline political selfhood through the realisation of private desire, but 'produc[e] multivalent subjects whose depths extend outward as well as inward'.[447] As such, *Mary Barton*'s marriage plot has come to be regarded as less problematic in recent years, as critics like Chris R Vanden Bossche and Hillary M Schor have argued that the political is and always was available in the novel's second half.

---

[442] *Ibid.* p. 101.

[443] *Ibid.* p. 100.

[444] Lee, p. 514.

[445] *Ibid.* p. 515.

[446] Susan Johnston, *Women and Domestic Experience in Victorian Political Fiction*, (Westport, Greenwood Press: 2001), pp. 2-3.

[447] Lee, p. 515.

A similar revision of critical opinion has also begun to reconsider the relationship between the seemingly conservative politics and emphasis on individual reformation of *North and South,* and the radical 'flow of sympathy' elicited in *Mary Barton*.[448] Raymond Williams is far from the only critic to regard *North and South* as a retreat of sorts from the subversive possibilities of Gaskell's work in *Mary Barton*. Indeed, the idea that civil unrest in the late 1840s 'forced' Gaskell to 'repress her sympathy for the working class and retreat from [John] Barton's radicalism' is pervasive, and, at least to some extent, supported by Gaskell herself.[449]

Before unpacking the reasons behind the very different ways that *Mary Barton* and *North and South* have historically been received, it is worth noting that they have always shared a consistent message. In the preface to *Mary Barton* Gaskell outlines a basic understanding of the Condition-of-England problem that both of her industrial novels would eventually uphold. There, she writes, that 'masters' and 'poor, uneducated factory-workers' are 'bound to *each other* by common interest' [emphasis added].[450] This central belief had not substantially altered by 1855, so that when Margaret Hale tells Thornton off for his refusal to speak plainly to his 'hands' about the need for lowered wages, her reasoning is essentially the same as Gaskell's own: 'I see two classes dependent on each other in every possible way, yet each evidently regarding the interests of the other as opposed to their own'.[451] It should be made clear that Gaskell's perspective on the Condition-of-England question was not unique. That the rich and poor were not two independent nations, but mutually responsible for the state of the whole of England is the conviction at the bottom of Disraeli's *Sybil*, for instance. Carlyle, too, makes it clear that working-class discontent is only a symptom of a larger disease and not the disease itself; while their misery is sure to flow upward, the real problem stems from the failure of the upper classes to take seriously the condition of the lower. And this view continued to have currency up

---

[448] Williams, p. 101.
[449] Lewis, p. 89.
[450] Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p. 3.
[451] Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 118.

through the end of the Condition-of-England period; when the 'Address to Working Men by Felix Holt' was published in January 1868, George Eliot also wrote 'none of us are so ignorant as to not know that a society, a nation is held together […] by the dependence of men on each other and the sense they have of a common interest in preventing injury'.[452] In each case the rich and poor must 'rise or fall together'.[453]

To be sure, there is some variation in how the mutual dependence of the classes is expressed, and, as a result, correspondent variation in the way that the problem of class alienation should be overcome. For Disraeli, new, visionary leadership grounded in a 'right understanding' of the nation coupled with a return to pre-industrial models of social organisation is necessary to social re-unification. Eliot kicks the can somewhat further down the road, by replacing the language of class-interest with 'class functions, or duties,' so that institutions transform slowly from within, rather than by violent pressure from without—in the 'Address', Felix Holt reasons that violence will go some way to forestalling anticipated changes by proving workers are not yet ready for the responsibility the vote confers.[454] And Gaskell's solution to the problem of class animosity is, once again, fairly consistent from *Mary Barton* to *North and South,* at least on the surface. In both novels the real trouble begins when masters refuse to communicate plainly with the men. In *Mary Barton* duplicate orders made to a rival manufactory on the Continent drives wages down so that the Manchester mills might compete, 'and in the long run the interests of the workmen would have thereby benefitted […] but the masters did not choose to make these facts known. They stood upon being the masters, and that they had a right to order work at their own prices'.[455] These same circumstances are reproduced in the scene from *North and South* invoked above. A strike brews on the horizon because the millowners of Milton-Northern, anticipating a period of poor trade, have collectively decided not to justify their

---

[452] George Eliot, 'Address to Working Men by Felix Holt', in *Felix Holt, the Radical*, ed. by Dinny Thorold, (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1997), p. 406.
[453] Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p. 171.
[454] Eliot, 'Address', pp. 408-09.
[455] Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p. 171.

reasons for lowering employee wages. In this decision Margaret reads not only Thornton's pride, but an infantilizing tendency that constructs Thornton's ideal working class as 'merely tall, large children […] with a blind unreasoning kind of obedience'.[456] Thus, both novels concern themselves with the working out of communication between the masters and men. By this point I hope it will be clear that the stuff that eventually brings John Barton together with Mr Carson, and Thornton with Higgins is a sympathetic recognition of fellowship and shared humanity that ultimately overcomes class differences. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to explore the shape of Gaskell's novelistic sympathy, the ways in which her novels converged with Enlightenment sympathetic models, how Gaskell's emotive writing style was interpreted by her contemporaries, and how her apparently 'unsustainable' sympathy with John Barton has been used as evidence of the neutralising effects of novel emotions more recently.

To that end, one of the things that I want to consider is the propensity in literary criticism to read *Mary Barton* and *North and South* together. Even where the primary focus of an article or book chapter is just one of Gaskell's industrial novels, contradictions between the two of them tend to be drawn in the margins. This makes sense to me, since *Mary Barton* and *North and South*—by virtue of sharing an author—offer a unique opportunity to gauge how Gaskell's position changed (or didn't) as time, and the Chartist threat, passed. In fact, until relatively recently, these novels were generally used to index a trend in the Condition-of-England period toward its conservative (or, at least unradical) conclusion. And while some of the scholarship referenced above has sought to recover some of the latent radicalism in *North and South* and the Condition-of-England genre as a whole, the most common narrative about these two novels is that, taken together, they epitomize the archetypal trajectory of all social-problem novels. The shift from *Mary Barton* to *North and South* illustrates how early potential and optimism harden into disappointment and inertia.

---

[456] Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 119.

Many have pointed out that this is a harsh view of the Condition-of-England novels. Indeed, Brigid Lowe's resistance to the idea that these novels had no real stake in representing the lives of the poor, or in reform is one of the things I find most appealing (and refreshing) about her argument.[457] Thus, the purpose of this section is not to uphold the view that the apparent sympathy of industrial novels masks the ways in which they reify dominant ideology or swap out actual institutional change for the imagined reconciliation of estranged classes. Rather, attention to the origin of this narrative can help to illustrate how the novel's trade in sympathetic emotions came to be regarded as its primary function, while its perceived potential for sparking meaningful institutional reform remained doubtful.

In order to read the Condition-of-England novels in-line with Lowe's frame, which is to say, reading their social criticism *sympathetically*, it becomes necessary to question some of the 'received wisdom' we have inherited about the gap between *Mary Barton* and *North and South*.[458] In the following section I will introduce some contemporary reviews of both *Mary Barton* and *North and South* in order to establish the terms through which early affective criticism was being made. These reviews explicitly critique the imaginary nature of literary emotions in language reminiscent of Smiles's in *Self-Help*, so that the novel-reader is both a passive vessel into which fictitious emotions could be deposited by a skilful writer, *and* potentially transformed by the introduction of unsocial passions into not only feeling subjects, but active participants in the destabilisation of the state. It has long been accepted that in the mid-nineteenth century this critique is likely a function of lingering anxiety that tended to draw parallels between the combination, demonstration, and striking of the British working class with revolutions taking place on continental Europe. In literary studies, such readings have been used to emphasise the role that novelistic sympathy may have played in upholding existing power structures, and the ways that affective experiences have historically been regarded as inactive ones.

Additionally, in tracking how the tradition of Enlightenment sympathy manifests (or does not) in Gaskell's novels and contemporary responses to them, it is important to be aware of how, by the mid-nineteenth century, the system of affective exchange that was theorized by Hume and Smith, became dislodged from their systems of social and economic management. Shared feelings and compassionate practice could certainly help to alleviate some of the discomfort associated with periods of bad trade, as both of Gaskell's novels suggest, but periods of bad trade would continue to come all the same, as we see forecasted in Thornton and Higgins' plan for the canteen. For Gaskell, sympathy is a force which can produce social cohesion, as Smith and Hume also suggest it should, but that cohesion does not necessarily manifest as an economically stable state, nor is it necessarily based in approbation over compassionate understanding, as we see in Carson's forgiveness of Barton.

Furthermore, we can see in both the self-effacement of the preface to *Mary Barton*—'I know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade'—and Margaret's self-proclaimed ignorance in the *North and South* scene quoted above, that Gaskell was hesitant to criticise accepted economic principles too forcefully.[459] Rather, as Jennifer MacLure persuasively argues, Gaskell's novels tend to implicate the antisympathetic means by which industry dismantled social structure (i.e. silent authoritarianism).[460] Thus, the sympathetic understanding that brings together the industrialist with the industrial worker in the end of these novels is difficult to fully reconcile with the blueprint laid out by the moral philosophers. At times, there seems to be an uneasy correlation between compassionate understanding and healthful economic activity that makes the ending of *North and South* so optimistic and compatible with the Enlightenment frame. In other instances, like in the Davenport cellar and Chartist meetings, shared feelings and individual charity have a dangerous potentiality. In my view, the fundamental differences between *Mary Barton* and *North and South* can be summed up by the revised transmissibility of

---

[459] Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p. 4.
[460] MacLure, p. 344.

emotions coupled with the means through which perfect sympathy is achieved; I argue that Gaskell never really loses sympathy for John in *Mary Barton*, and that *North and South* does not, then, constitute a retreat from her central thesis. Instead, in the turn from the former novel to the latter, we can track a shift in the depiction of emotions. In *Mary Barton* they are a pathogenic affliction of sickly bodies. In *North and South* emotional sharing is scrubbed clean of its contaminating potential. Where, hunger, disease and, ultimately child-death are the primary vehicles of emotional transference in *Mary Barton*, by the time Gaskell writes *North and South* Thornton and Higgins come to recognize their mutual interest not through shared suffering (though they acknowledge in a hypothetical sense that they both would suffer should the mill fail), but through shared potential. In the second half of this chapter, I will explore this move from shared suffering to shared sustenance, arguing that *North and South* appears less radical because its logic of 'actual personal contact' has come to represent a safe meeting of the minds, rather than the potentially destabilizing bodily contact that is so problematic throughout *Mary Barton*.

(I) Two Novels United in the Critical Imagination

Literary criticism has *always* been interested in the relationship between Elizabeth Gaskell's two industrial novels. As soon as *North and South* was published, periodical reviewers, animated by their shared subject matter, seized upon all that showed *North and South* to be a better novel than its predecessor. For example, this positive review in the *Fife Herald*—published just after the final number of *North and South* in January of 1840—remarked favourably on its tonal differences and shift in emphasis from *Mary Barton*. Specifically, the reviewer points to the later novel's more balanced perspective:

Apart from all the other merits of this periodical, Mrs Gaskell's story of *North and South* is itself worth greatly more than the price of a whole volume […] Breadth, pathos, and naturalness—a

deep sympathy with the poor, yet no meaningless condemnation of the rich—are the pervasive characteristics of a tale which marks out the author of *Mary Barton* as one of the leading writers of our day.[461]

This review is a miniature version of many of the reviews of *North and South* that followed. First the review praises Gaskell's emotive writing style, particularly as relates to the evocative quality of her pity. Second, in a move that would become almost irresistible to the critics that followed, the review takes the opportunity to contrast *North and South* with *Mary Barton*. Though this article in *The Fife Herald* is occasioned by the end of *North and South*, it speaks to the general reception of both of Gaskell's industrial novels, and openly acknowledges their literary quality, while tacitly contrasting their politics.

 Mary Barton was well-known and popular, despite its sympathetic depiction of Chartist and murderer, John Barton. At the time, the novel was understood to disproportionately represent the interests of the working class, and was criticised for its seemingly one-dimensional middle class, of whom the murdered Harry Carson was the principal victim. In the preface to *Mary Barton*, Gaskell wrote that the novel provided an opportunity 'to give some utterance to the agony which […] convulses this dumb people; the agony of suffering without the sympathy of the happy, or of erroneously believing that such is the case'.[462] The remainder of the book sees this project through, and is one of few industrial novels (*Michael Armstrong* and *Alton Locke* are others) to take actual working-class characters for its focus, rather than hidden aristocrats or the reforming middle-class. This emphasis on 'giving utterance' to the voiceless working class—a construction inspired by Carlyle—troubled some readers, not necessarily because of the living conditions that the novel exposed, but for its late redemption of John Barton and apparent sympathy with working-class attempts at political organization.

---

[461] 'Review of *Household Words*', *The Fife Herald, Kinross, Strathearn and Clackmannan Advertiser* (Cupar, 18 January 1855), no 1767, *British Library Newspapers, Part V: 1746-1950, GALE* [accessed 3 September 2019], p.4.
[462] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed. by Macdonald Daly, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 3.

Gaskell, in personal correspondence, always defended the truth of *Mary Barton*, especially as the novel began to generate more national attention, and as reviewers began to criticise the 'state of feeling' that the novel attributed to the poor of Manchester.[463] In a letter addressed to her publisher Edward Chapman, Gaskell remarked on the polarising effects of *Mary Barton*, writing 'half the masters here are bitterly angry with me—half (and the best half) are buying it [*Mary Barton*] to give to their work people's libraries'.[464] In the same letter she mentions having read two contradictory reviews of the novel, which she then presents as emblematic of the opposing sides of the debate that the novel sparked; on the critical side was *The British Quarterly Review*, and on the complimentary side, *The Westminster Review*.

Beginning with the positives, the article in *The Westminster Review* praised the artistry of *Mary Barton* and favourably compared the title character to such heroines as Frances Burney's Evelina and Cecilia, and Maria Edgeworth's Belinda. Mary, like the fictional ladies she keeps company with, is notable because she is ordinary, being 'no heiress […] living upon the product of other people's labour'.[465] And, as *The Fife Herald* would echo some years later in *its* review of *North and South*, here Gaskell's 'pathos', 'good feeling', 'powerful narration' and 'graphic description' are unsurpassable.[466] This praise actively combines intense, sympathetic experiences with narrative technique and skill, so that the emotional experience the text provides is very much the result of intelligent authorial design. Indeed, the reviewer points specifically to the novel's climax during the search for Will Wilson and the subsequent trial, writing that these scenes are 'so life-like, so unexaggerated, that the fiction disappears, and the reader seems placed as an anxious spectator, both on the pier watching the progress of the boat […] and in the court of justice'.[467]

---

[463] Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p. 4.
[464] Letter to Edward Chapman, 1 January 1849, in *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. by J A V Chapple and Arthur Pollard, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1966), p. 68.
[465] W. E., 'Review of *Mary Barton*', *The Westminster Review*, April – July 1849, Vol LI, (London: George Luxford), 48-63, p. 48.
[466] *Ibid.* p. 48.
[467] *Ibid.* p. 58.

I want to pause here to unpack this reviewer's description of the experience of reading, where scenes of high emotion invite the telescopic projection of the reader into the text. The reader becomes an anxious spectator within the text, which is to say that the reader becomes a part of the fiction itself, rather than a spectator *of* the text, where the fiction remains separate and distant from the reader. In writing that such scenes make the fiction 'disappear', the review points to the process by which the fiction produces very real anxiety in the reader, such that the reader's experiences on the dock and in the court are also made real.[468] This is a reciprocal version of reading wherein the text acts upon the mind of the reader at the same time that the reader's emotional participation enlivens the text. Moreover, the mutually reinforcing movement of emotions between text and reader and back again posits a view of reading wherein the mind and text are both porous.

This review is impressed by Gaskell's cultivation of readerly sympathies throughout *Mary Barton*, not just during those scenes where emotions can be enclosed and safely deployed. In describing the steps that lead to Harry Carson's murder, the *Westminster Review* seems interestingly unperturbed by John's status as murderer. In fact, the reviewer goes some way to naturalising John's murderous feelings, writing:

That John should have had the discontent, engendered by want, increased to hatred towards the class of rich employers, is not strange […] the patience and long-suffering of the industrious poor left in the ignorance which we see, are more strange than the conclusions to which John arrives, and which lead him an unwilling agent, step by step, to the crime.[469]

What is important here is how the reviewer interprets the transformation of John's feelings of discontent into hate. Not only is this not seen as a troubling development, but the reviewer also portrays it as a reasonable development. There is some tension between this reviewer's sympathetic understanding of John's hate and the agency, or lack thereof, that this reading

---

[468] *Ibid.* p. 54.
[469] *Ibid.* p. 51.

attributes to him. In this view, John is explicitly positioned as an 'unwilling' actor, led step-by-step by his (class) resentments to commit the murder. This reading of the transformation of John's emotions into concrete action has two significant effects. First, it goes some way to exonerating John of the crime, which the review's rather stern analysis of Harry Carson's 'class morality' adds to.[470] The idea that John is naturally led by his emotions to the murder imagines a working class made more susceptible to unsocial passions because they are occasioned, and intensified, by physical want. As readers well know, 'hordes of vengeance' develop in John's heart after the clemming of his son Tom, and he only becomes aware of the true source of this untoward hate after the murder has been committed.[471] But this reading also imagines a working class that are insensible to their own passions, unable to resist, via good judgement, anger, hate and resentment, and where they are drawn into unsocial activity not necessarily by their own desires. Thus, the review does not hold John responsible for the crime, because the working class are only agents in a limited sense. That being said, the *Westminster Review* does hold John responsible for his failure to save during periods of high wages, and also holds Gaskell responsible for her ignorance regarding theories of political economy that she spells out in the preface.[472]

In turning to the less favourable review of *Mary Barton* that appeared in *The British Quarterly Review* in February of 1849, I want to keep in mind what this article shares with that of *The Westminster Review* above. Tonally, the reviews are very different to one another, as is their view of the sympathetic emotions at the crux of the *British Quarterly Review*'s critique. Overall, this reviewer disagrees with the 'state of feelings' Gaskell ascribes to the workers of Manchester, writing that as more attention was being paid to the condition of the poor, more fictitious feelings about them promulgate:

---

[470] *Ibid.* p. 50.
[471] Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p. 25.
[472] *Ibid.* p. 60.

Of course it was to be expected that a great deal of the sympathy called forth would be of the spurious kind, the mere outpouring of that mawkish sentimentality which pays regard to the sufferings of the poor only because their reality gives a more pungent relish to the luxury of an imaginary compassion.[473]

It is, I think, useful to recall Smiles' 'fictitious feelings' in order to unpack the 'spurious' sympathy that this reviewer scorns. In *Self-Help* Smiles expressed an aversion to 'literary pity' because such feelings resulted in no positive social action; for Smiles, novels divert the corollaries of actual pity, 'labour', 'pains' and 'self-denial', so that sympathetic feelings might be indulged in without any personal inconvenience. The *British Quarterly Review* expresses a like suspicion about the effects of literary pity, and how representations of the poor were mobilised to satisfy the troublesome feelings that novels gave rise to in the rich.

This review accuses the novel of providing voyeuristic access to the sufferings of the poor, as a means of satisfying the emotional appetites of readers at their ease. Again, the gastronomic metaphor in 'pungent relish' makes explicit connections between fictitious feeling and gross consumption. This description can also be productively read as a criticism of the practice of 'slumming', which was one way that efforts to understand and generate knowledge about the poor manifested during the Victorian period. In his book *Slumming* (2006) Seth Koven writes, 'the widely shared imperative among well-to-do men and women to traverse class boundaries […] was somehow bound up in their insistent eroticization of poverty'.[474] Thus, the distaste that the *British Quarterly Review* expresses regarding the pungent realities of the poor is bound up in the dual suspicion of novelistic intention and consumption.

This distaste, at least in part, informs the second half of the phrase, which argues that the 'imaginary compassion' such depictions give rise to is a 'luxury'. To begin with, the well-to-do only feel compassion for the poor because their circumstances are such that they don't have to

---

[473] 'Review of *Mary Barton*, *The British Quarterly Review* (01 February 1849), Vol. 9, no. 17, 117-136, pp. 117-18.
[474] Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.04963, EPUB, p. 4.

feel the actual feelings of the poor. This is crucial to note, because it suggests that 'compassion' is a specific feeling that *Mary Barton* produces in readers and not the sympathetic experiences of John's or Mary's emotions. Moreover, the compassion is imaginary. Like Smiles, the *British Quarterly Review* is critical of the idea that the compassion these texts engender translates into meaningful action. Indeed, the reviewer writes that 'imaginary compassion' is relieved 'in moving speeches before fashionable assemblages, or in the red-hot philanthropy of a newspaper article'.[475] Consequently, the text that draws attention to the lives of the poor only ever generates more words and more text.

Notwithstanding that the poor need any more words, as this review also satirises the conceit of the preface to 'give some utterance' on behalf of the 'dumb people' the novel purports to represent. In contrast, the *British Quarterly Review* writes that the working class 'have always seemed to us by no means chary of expressing what they think and feel,' and that, even if they were reticent, 'there have been agitators in plenty to inflame their discontent and lead them on to the most violent and reckless expression of feeling'.[476] Coupled with the above critique of compassionate indulgence, this section contends that *Mary Barton*, and novels like it (the reviewer explicitly compares the book to Disraeli's *Sybil*), condescend to the poor.[477] These, he writes, purport to speak on behalf of the poor when the poor have real voices of their own; by the same token, in having a greater reach and more diffusible medium, these novels that want to speak *for* the poor, end up speaking *over* the poor.

The British Quarterly Review is anxious to point out that while there has certainly been some unfriendliness between masters and men in Manchester in the past, *Mary Barton* is not a fair representation of the current state of feeling, and that workmen in particular are not so volatile as John Barton is. This is important to acknowledge because neither of the reviews, whether complimentary or critical, have been particularly concerned by the idea that the fictional murder

---

[475] *British Quarterly Review*, 01 Feb 1849, p. 118.
[476] *Ibid.* p. 121.
[477] *Ibid.* p. 121.

might inflame the imagined working-class reader into real destructive action. In fact, they both seem to suggest that John's portrait might be unfair to the real workmen of Manchester. This is very different from responses to Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* for example, which accused the novel of 'scattering firebrands' throughout the country. But this awareness does not mean that the reviewer has a perspective on labour relations and the autonomous working class that is vastly more enlightened than his contemporaries. His suggestion that the poor are easily 'inflame[d]' by agitators into violent expression goes some way to demonstrating, contrary to his earlier insistence, that working-class discontent teeters on the edge of greater violence.

The last thing I want to stress about this review is its distrust of the novel's emotions. The reviewer takes particular umbrage with the preface, where Gaskell writes 'it is not for me to judge' 'whether the bitter complaints made by' the workmen 'were well-founded'.[478] Of course, the judgement of emotional pitch and propriety is an essential quality of Smithian partial sympathies. But in not offering a judgement or commentary about the appropriateness of the feelings *in* the novel, the *British Quarterly Review* is anxious about how fictitious feelings might manifest *outside* of the novel:

We think that in not having judged, the writer left out one of the most necessary qualifications for writing such a tale that is before us […] This might have been sufficient, if the author had simply *described* or *asserted*. But the very nature of such a work of fiction as that before us necessitated the exhibition of circumstances under which the feelings portrayed are to be supposed manifested. The *distresses* of the labouring poor are set forth in ample detail.[479]

According to the above, had the novel simply described the feelings of the poor, no harm would have been done. But because the novel instead describes the circumstances that occasion the distress of the poor, equal distress might also manifest in readers, by-passing the reader's capacity for sympathetic judgements as well. In contrast to the review's earlier scepticism of the

---

[478] Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p. iii.
[479] *The Westminster Review*, 01 Feb 1849, p. 122.

experience of compassion, now he writes that readers thrust into the circumstances of suffering have no opportunity to judge from their ease the propriety of novelistic feelings before they take root.

Before turning to the reception of *North and South,* I want to include one final contemporary review of *Mary Barton* that highlights the novel's 'meaningless condemnation of the rich'. The *Manchester Guardian* was particularly fierce in its critique of *Mary Barton*, writing 'if the work had met with the fate of nineteen out of twenty of the novels published now-a-days, I might have been well content to let it sink into oblivion, with its false statements unchallenged, and its doubtful logic unquestioned,' but having reached a third edition and 'thus showing that it is being well read, […] its errors have become dangerous'.[480] The review goes on to critique the central tenets of Gaskell's argument as they are framed in the preface, which is then contrasted against the limitations of novelistic form:

The authoress of this truthful tale of Manchester life acknowledges that the interests of both masters and men are really the same; and if her intention were to get both parties to act together for their mutual benefit, it would have been well to have considered whether her book would have that tendency or not. As a whole, the tale is beautifully written; the characters introduced are graphically documented; the events are so interestingly interwoven, and the groundwork is so artistically constructed that whoever reads the first two chapters is sure to read the whole story.[481]

Here, what's clear is that the *Guardian* reviewer is not disputing Gaskell's view that the masters and men share a common interest as such, rather the reviewer expresses some scepticism as to whether or not the remainder of the novel supports that claim. For the *Guardian,* it is not enough that the preface gestures to the twinned fates of both parties, because this rhetoric is undermined by the novel's sustained depictions of working-class suffering.

---

[480] 'Review of *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life* from a correspondent', *The Manchester Guardian*, (17 February 1849)

[481] *Manchester Guardian*

Moreover, the review states that the novel is a 'libel' against the workers of Manchester who have 'never committed a murder under any such circumstances,' and a libel against the millowners who 'have never been exceeded by those of any other part of the kingdom in acts of charity, both public and private'.[482] This concern appears to be about objectivity in illustrating the conditions in Manchester—and, as an aside, since Manchester was the home of the *Guardian*, it was both particularly defensive of its city, and well-placed to offer an apparently informed counter-argument. Thus, the birth of a trend that would become a regular feature of reviews of *Mary Barton*: an apparent defence of the Mancunian working-class as non-violent, and a more pressing emphasis on millowners' effusive benevolence. Indeed, the *Guardian* finds it especially unfair that the novel does not mention the establishment of public parks, the founding of libraries and mechanical institutes, or the common practice of paying hands in advance when necessary. I want to suggest that the defence of workers and advance of masters are really two sides of the same coin in this review. As in the preface to *Michael Armstrong* discussed in the previous chapter, the *Guardian*'s recovery of the working class from any dangerous connotations has the supplementary effect of neutralizing their energies and minimising the extent to which access to political power impacts upon their lived experiences. That the *Guardian* calls *Mary Barton* a 'partial representation' in order to clock its over-interest in workers at the expense of mill-owners is evidence of the anxiety that working-class experiences might displace or disrupt bourgeois ones. This is the kernel of the *Guardian*'s analysis, for to grant that the working class might be capable of disrupting dominant power structures is also to suggest that they may be capable of achieving their aims. Hence, the reassertion of the caretaking capabilities of the middle-class made by the reviewer in the *Guardian* since it was not properly asserted in the novel.

The final point I want to make about the *Guardian*'s treatment of *Mary Barton*, is that in spite of its criticisms the reviewer is complimentary of Gaskell's 'beautifully written' tale.[483] The

---

[482] *Ibid.*
[483] *Ibid.*

reviewer admires the rich and moving character portraits throughout, specifically acknowledging Jem, Mary, Job Legh, and Margaret, while conspicuously leaving out both John Barton and Mr Carson, whom, it seems, are more like caricatures than portraits. Again, this compliment is double-edged; where the review praises Gaskell's artistry, it equally condemns her 'sin[s] […] against truth'.[484] The *Guardian* review goes on to mock the claims to realism made in the preface, repeating the epithet 'a truthful tale of Manchester life' several times throughout the article, and with increasing sarcasm.[485] This tendency of the press to question the accuracy of the fiction, which I also discussed in chapter three, is just one of the methods that subordinates novels and fictions to the 'objectivity' of the press. Thus, the implicit editorial, the more artistic the tale, the less likely it is to represent the 'truth'.

And certainly, many were concerned about the extent to which novels could give an accurate accounting of the truth. In November of 1848 Thomas Carlyle wrote to Elizabeth Gaskell in praise of *Mary Barton* for being 'a Book […] far above the ordinary garbage of novels'.[486] He too, was particularly interested in the reality beneath the fiction, writing, 'unless I mistake, you are capable of going still deeper into this subject, and of bringing up more Portraits of Manchester Existence still more strikingly *real*—which latter quality is the grand value of them in the end'.[487] As the tone of his letter makes apparent, Carlyle was not much accustomed to the praise of fiction and did not attribute much value to the majority of novels that he read. Therefore, it is in keeping with his general attitude that the 'grand value' of the novel should be the real behind the representation. And unlike others who viewed fiction as the pleasant packaging that dressed up, and made palatable uncomfortable messaging about social degradation, there is a sense in Carlyle's letter that he also viewed the artistry surrounding the

---

[484] *Ibid.*
[485] *Ibid.*
[486] Letter from Thomas Carlyle to the Author of *Mary Barton*, 8 November 1848, (Duke University Press, 2019), carlyleletters.dukepress.edu, [accessed 31 Oct 2019].
[487] *Ibid.* p. 1.

representation as an unnecessary addition—in a funny turn of phrase he advises Gaskell to 'roast' the 'water' out of her prose.[488]

Where critical reviews in *The Guardian* and *British Quarterly Review* pointed out the unreality of John's situation (as well as of Carson's forgiveness), positive reviews like *The Westminster Review* portrayed his crime as the unconscious outpouring of his natural (and amoral) hatred. But both of these readings diverge somewhat from the received wisdom about *Mary Barton*'s dangerous potential. And as the novel aged, its portrayal of a working class constructed by unsocial passions was understood to lack potency, and Gaskell's sympathy with the suffering of the poor outlived any negative associations with violent Chartism. Before the century's end, the lop-sided attention of *Mary Barton* was remembered with indulgence, as in this article from *The Eastern Weekly Reader*:

No one was better acquainted with the life she tried to depict than Mrs Gaskell, and there is no doubt that on the whole she gave a true picture. A little one-sided it may have been, but that side existed in all its horrible reality, and it is impossible for any enthusiast to produce a work of art in vivid colours that shall reflect all sides.[489]

Again, the retrospective above emphasises the 'real problem' with *Mary Barton* which is that it did not give enough attention to the efforts that the upper classes were already making to ease working-class suffering, but that this error can be overlooked because of Gaskell's evident talent as an artist.

When Gaskell wrote her next industrial novel *North and South,* she already had in mind a different tack, no doubt influenced by the general sentiment that *Mary Barton* did not represent all sides of the issue. At least, this is how Gaskell's letter to Lady Kay Shuttleworth, which seems an almost too perfect germ of *North and South*, is generally understood. There, Gaskell imagined how a novel on the *other* side of the question might proceed:

---

[488] *Ibid.* p. 1
[489] 'The Story of Mary Barton', *The Eastern Weekly Leader*, (10 August 1895), p. 10.

I can not imagine a more nobler [sic.] scope for a thoughtful energetic man, desirous of doing good to his kind, than that presented his powers as the master of a factory […] It would require a wise man, practical and full of experience, [one] able to calculate consequences, to choose out the best among many systems which are being tried by the benevolent mill-owners […] I think he, or such as he, might almost be made the hero of a fiction on the other side of the question—the trials of the conscientious rich man, in his dealings with the poor. And I should like some *man*, who had a man's correct knowledge, to write on this subject, and make the poor intelligent work-people understand the infinite anxiety as to right and wrong-doing which I believe riches bring to many.[490]

The above foreshadows, of course, Mr Thornton's character and the ultimate development of his experimental mill. And it is clear from the rest of the letter that the significant difference between *Mary Barton* and *North and South* was not only the class position of the novel's hero. *Mary Barton* represented the already extant conditions that working people lived under. Whereas the idea that would eventually become *North and South* (though at this stage Gaskell was adamant that she had no plans to write such a narrative herself) would be a prescriptive story about a benevolent mill-owner, representing conditions that weren't yet a reality, but that could be.

Another facet of Gaskell's early resistance to the writing of a second industrial novel, besides the obvious lack of appetite, is that her ambition to do good with her fiction might easily be thwarted by her ignorance of trade, which had already proven to be a black mark against *Mary Barton*. But there is more to Gaskell's framing of her own ignorance in this letter that speaks to a desire to mobilise economic arguments in service of her sympathetic feelings: 'if I, in my ignorance, chose out [a benevolent mill-owner] which appeared to me good, but which was known to business men to be a failure, I should be doing an injury instead of a service'.[491] Underlying this lack of confidence is the conviction that if Thornton (or, an as of yet unimagined character *like* Thornton) was to be a prescriptive character, than his designs and experiments ought to work. What makes this more interesting is that when *North and South* eventually came to fruition, Thornton's mill nearly fails in spite of his benevolence, practicality, and wisdom, and it

---

[490] Letter to Lady Kay Shuttleworth, 16 July 1850?, *Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, pp. 119-20.
[491] *Ibid*. p. 120.

is only the much commented-on influx of Margaret's legacy that saves the day. I have already shown how Williams interprets the legacy as the essence of the fantastical nature of novelistic solutions to the Condition-of-England problem. I think this letter makes it clear that Gaskell was acutely aware that benevolence, no matter how disinterested, would not lead to the widespread reform of institutions, and that reforms that could be shown to be profitable (in the 'money sense') were much more likely to be adopted.[492] The failure of Thornton's mill after all, is Gaskell's concession that reform, well-meaning as it may be, is no guarantee of business success.

Though, as I have noted above, many contemporary readers of *North and South* appreciated the novel's more bourgeois perspective, the novel was far from universally celebrated upon its conclusion. One influential review in *The Leader* made much of the propensity among middle-class interventionists to represent trade inaccurately, going so far as to suggest 'women and clergymen' both ought to give 'masters-and-men questions a wide berth'.[493] Accordingly, the review begins by distinguishing between the literary qualities that make *North and South* a good *novel*, and its factual errors in depicting 'the cotton trade of Lancashire' which, for this reviewer, makes the novel an overall failure. The reviewer literally creates a list of all of the errors in the novel's portrayal of Milton-Northern, including everything from the plausibility of Thornton's financial difficulties, Lancashire custom with regard to accepting payments and wages, the precise nature of stock holding and mill tenancies, the lack of pressure caused by the American market, and Margaret's personal failings as evinced by her choice to *lend* Thornton the money he needs, rather than gifting it to him.[494] That many of these details—aside from the last, which caps off the marriage plot—are not essential to the movements of the plot, and easily could have been remedied without significant alteration to the story, seems to suggest to the reviewer that they ought to have been right to begin with. Or rather, the reviewer seems to

---

[492] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 71.
[493] 'Review of *North and South*', in *The Leader*, 14 April 1855, Vol. VII, no. 264, ncse.ac.uk/periodicals/l/issues [accessed 4 July 2019], p. 365.
[494] *Ibid.* p. 365.

suggest, like Smiles does, that novels are either a vehicle of entertainment, *or* an instrument of education, but that these two impulses cannot coexist in the same work.

Indeed, *The Leader* review suggests *North and South* to be seriously over-estimating its own powers and, in so doing, over-complicating matters:

As to assisting to solve vexed questions of capital and labour by fiction, why take two round-about volumes to say what we can say in thirty words. There can be no solution of this question till both master and man have learned that neither money, nor things purchasable by money, are the highest ends of man's being here.[495]

Of course, as I have noted in the introduction to this chapter, Gaskell consistently argues that the rich and poor must recognize their common interest in order to 'get over' the Condition-of-England problem.[496] Furthermore, I want to suggest that the Shuttleworth letter demonstrates that she is not so naive as to think that readers will simply choose to behave better to each other because of their shared humanity. Rather, that idea seems to be more appropriate to *Mary Barton* where the shared pain of the death of a son, and a heavy dose of religious sentimentality, helps John Barton and Mr Carson to recognise each other as fellow men. North *and South*, however, is deeply invested in the 'getting of money' and 'things purchasable' by money.[497]

So central is money to *North and South* that money troubles are not limited to the poor in the getting of food; nor is money connected only to cycles of trade that mean that mill-owners have more or less orders to fulfil, and as a result, more or less money to go around at any one time. Even Margaret's dislike of 'shoppy people' does not insulate the Hales from getting caught up in the getting and spending of money.[498] In fact, the impetus of the rest of the novel, Mr Hale's unendurable religious doubts, put the family under sufficient enough financial strain so that they must remove to Milton-Northern, where money is likely to be. This also complicates

---

[495] *Ibid.* p. 365.
[496] *Ibid.* p. 365.
[497] *Ibid.* p. 365.
[498] Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 20.

more recent readings of *North and South* which position the domestic sphere as the site of private, unmercantile resolution to the problem of class estrangement, because *North and South* details a home life hemmed in on all sides by money. The search for a new house in Milton-Northern, the patterned wall-paper, the cleanliness of the curtains, Margaret's search for a suitable maid, and the differences in domestic comforts across class boundaries are all drawn as distinctions, not necessarily of taste, but of income. One example of recent scholarship that has engaged with *North and South*'s money matters is Anne Longmuir's work on the role of shopping in *North and South*. Longmuir draws out the relationship between shopping and consumption, so that economic subjectivity becomes conflated with sexual visibility.[499] To shorten a rather long point, *North and South* tells us that money and the getting of it may not be the *ends* of man; however, the novel is also alive to the many ways in which money already structures human relationships and brings together people who otherwise would not come into contact with one another.

Returning to *The Leader*, I want to explore its animosity toward the reforming impulse, especially as it manifests in the social-problem novel. The reviewer calls the cotton trade '*the pons asinorum* of novelists' and lists several other failed contemporary attempts to deal with 'questions of masters-and-men' in fiction:

Mrs Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* was a gross, dauby libel; Disraeli's *Sybil* was a sketch of the trade from a Caucassion point of view; Mrs Jewsbury, a Manchester lady, only saved *Marian Withers* from being a failure by ceasing to make it a Lancashire tale; and here we have Mrs Gaskell […] failing distinctly, not in the tale, for *North and South* is a successful and good novel, but in an attempt to dramatize spinning and weaving, and throw light on the vexed questions of corn and cotton, of masters and men. Such failures we hold to be inevitable. A novel must have the same essential dramatic characteristics, the same principles of incident, lay the scene where you will; if you lay the scene in Lancashire, and are true to its men and present arrangements, you cannot have those essential requirements.[500]

---

[499] Anne Longmuir, 'Consuming Subjects: Women and the Market in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, (2012), 34.3, 237-52, **https://doi.org/10.1080/08905495.2012.691821** [accessed 2 Sept 2019].
[500] *Leader*, 14 April 1855, p. 365.

According to this review, it is not only Gaskell's novels that are unsuited to the parsing of economic conditions, nor does this rebuke apply to female novelists only. Rather, it is fiction itself that is unable to represent or contain the substance of the Lancashire cotton trade. The *Leader* finds that the needs of fiction, namely drama, resolution and, above all, entertainment, are wholly incompatible with practicable suggestions on this front. But, finding the novel as a genre unsatisfactory in this regard, ironically begs the question whether fiction's purpose is representational after all. If, in this view, the novel is unsuited, or unable, to imagine satisfactory answers to the Condition-of-England question, is it still necessary that the question itself—the essential nature of labour and capital—be represented with unimpeachable fidelity?

It is also worth mentioning that despite challenging the project of the social-problem novel on the same grounds as the other reviews I have looked at, *The Leader* review does not ultimately dismiss the need for redressing the relationship between manufacturer and man, and takes seriously the degraded condition of the poor, which most other reviews take as a matter of course. Indeed, this reviewer even goes so far as to acknowledge that these are 'vexed questions' which require the attention of 'sound, strong, masculine, practical insight [to] aid their solution,' without the troublesome influence of fiction.[501]

As was the case in the prevailing response to *Michael Armstrong* more than a decade earlier, *The Leader* draws boundaries that divide frivolous novels from the serious subjects they address, suggesting that the information within them is incomplete and that the demands of narrative necessarily overpower the intricacies of subject-specific knowledge. In *The Athenaeum,* which I made much of in the previous chapter, the reviewer also asserted that masters and men shared a common interest in success, though was fairly blasé about the disparate implications of failure: 'the paramount necessity is to keep the mill going […] This is the common interest of both parties; though the immediate evil falling most heavily on the operative, (inasmuch [sic.] as

---

[501] *Ibid.* p. 365.

diminished pay is famine,) sometimes blinds him to the reason of the case'.[502] The critical

distance the reviewer asserts, encapsulated in the post-Enlightenment invocation of 'reason' as a

catch-all for that which is obvious, devastatingly undercuts the possibility of emotional responses

to the reality of starving, which none of these reviewers are much interested in. Instead, their

scope is limited to correcting inaccurate representations of trade, of the desires of manufacturers,

of the incendiary goals of the Chartists, and most importantly, of admonishing the conceit of

novelists to muddy the waters by inserting questions of morality into a debate so clearly about

mechanics.

According to these reviewers, sympathy, while an admirable quality in fiction, is out of

place in a debate that is primarily about the practicalities of free trade and reduced government

intervention, and though the interests of manufacturers and labourers are certainly the same (*viz.*

both prosper when the mill prospers,) this is an essentially pragmatic relationship. Here, the

working class does not require a caretaking upper or middle class, not because of an egalitarian

belief in their rights to self-determination, or unthinkable support for the franchise, but because

they will all feast or starve together, according to what the market dictates. Further, the

frequency with which the periodical press made claims to representing the 'facts' of industrial

relations and the 'natural' 'laws' of political economy, exposes the sexist topography that

underpins the literary landscape of the mid-nineteenth century. I make this point not just to go

over already well-trodden ground by acknowledging a set of cultural assumptions that

subordinated the feminized novel to more (apparently) masculine literary and scientific modes,

although they are certainly at work here.[503] I also want to suggest that the claims made by the

periodical press of access to unassailable 'facts', and the ability to properly interpret the natural

expression of economic 'laws' likewise subordinates humanist approaches to the Condition-of-

England question to the seemingly immutable dictates of 'Nature'.[504] In so doing, the press

---

[502] 'Review of *Michael Armstrong*', in *The Athenaeum*, 10 Aug 1839, p. 587.
[503] Walton, p. 278.
[504] *Athenaeum*, 10 August 1839, p. 587.

asserts its authority to deal more effectively with questions of trade than novels can, because the journal article is a fundamentally *unsympathetic* medium, presented in direct opposition to the well-meaning, but ultimately too-emotional novel.

As I have suggested above, the questions of accuracy and the failures of these novels to imagine their way out of prevailing modes of social organisation have been considered extensively in the first and second waves of criticism of Condition-of-England novels. Here, I am suggesting that this approach to *North and South* and novels like it, is an incarnation of *The Leader*'s and *The British Quarterly Review*'s model for judging the capacity of fiction to penetrate and deal with economic problems. Both periodicals fail to take seriously Gaskell's broader critique, the role of humanist sympathy within that critique, and how Gaskell comes to use the logic of the marketplace to press for greater social reform, rather than the inverse approach typically associated with the Victorian social-problem novel, where sympathy is positioned as an antidote to economic alienation.

Finally, I want to turn back to the loaded phrasing of the review in the *Fife Herald* in regard to the conclusion of *North and South*; that review suggests that the novel is successful, not only for the beautiful depth of sympathy Gaskell clearly demonstrates for the poor, but because it is paired against 'no meaningless condemnation of the rich'. Synthesized in this short, seemingly innocuous praise for *North and South*, are all of the assumptions about fiction's relationship to real economic systems and real people, and the dangers posed by a working-class susceptible to those fictions. Here, we can and should read 'meaningless condemnation' as a sort of short-hand for essentially 'blameless' manufacturers that benefit from 'natural' market forces. Thus, for *The Fife Herald*, *North and South* rectifies the most significant 'error' of *Mary Barton*, which is a sustained, sympathetic depiction of suffering that the readership cannot fully access. As a possible in-road, Margaret is introduced as a peg for the readership to hang their sympathies on, a model for how to read the suffering of others without it translating into suffering in the self, and, most importantly, a magic mirror which purports to *reflect* the unadulterated role of the

moral middle class, but really shows them as they wish to see themselves: as a Smithian-styled generous spectator that acts so others don't have to.

(II) Decontaminating 'Actual Personal Contact'; Moving Toward a Sympathy of the Mind in *North and South*[505]

In this section I will explore the effects of the shift from John Barton to Margaret Hale, wherein feeling directly into the circumstances of the poor comes to be replaced by feeling through the reforming middle class. In so doing, I will argue that the dangerous and unhealthy circumstances in *Mary Barton* necessarily produced dangerous and unhealthy feelings. When Gaskell reimagined the industrial novel with the middle class at the centre, the feelings that the novel could transmit, and the method of delivery necessarily changed too. As a result, *North and South*'s 'actual personal contact,' necessary to the formation of sympathetic relationships, is scrubbed clean of its unhealthy potential, even as Gaskell repurposes the metaphor of contagion.

Turning now to the novels, I want to first sketch the effects of Gaskell's emphasis on materiality in *Mary Barton* which creates the conditions needed for sympathetic identification to occur. As the tea party in the beginning of *Mary Barton* demonstrates, attention to material detail inserts the reader into the circumstances of the Bartons which allows for the independent production of feeling in the mind of the reader. This scene is a relatively happy one and therefore not particularly taxing for the reader to enter into; but it is because the reader has already identified with the Bartons in this early scene, that their fall in circumstances is so affecting as the novel progresses. The innocuousness of the tea party, its 'ruddy glow' and air of friendly contentment is a formal trick that the novel uses to both stake its claim to realism and cultivate the sympathetic identification of the reader. The reader, the 'you' the novel keeps

---

[505] Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 421.

guiding, enters into the Bartons' circumstances, but only through the barest of imaginative

exercises, as the work is all done for you by the narration:

On entering the house-place it seemed as if they were in total darkness, except one bright spot
[…] a red-hot fire, smouldering under a large piece of coal, which John Barton immediately
applied himself to break up, and the effect instantly produced was warm and glowing light in
every corner of the room […] The room was tolerably large, and possessed many conveniences
[…] a longish window, with a broad ledge [and] blue-and-white check curtains […] now drawn,
to shut in the friends met to enjoy themselves.[506]

This same technique is used to bring the reader into the Davenport cellar a few chapters

later:

You went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human
beings lived. It was very dark inside. The window-panes, many of them broken and stuffed with
rags, which was reason enough for the dusky light that pervaded the place even at mid-day […]
On going into the cellar inhabited by Davenport, the smell was so fœtid [sic.] as almost to knock
the two men down […] They began to penetrate the thick darkness of the place, and to see three
or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy
moisture of the street oozed up; the wife sat on her husband's lair, and cried in the dark
loneliness.[507]

Unlike 'our friends', who were 'not dainty' and 'quickly recover[ed] themselves, as those inured

to such things do', literary criticism seemingly still has not recovered from the Davenport

cellar.[508] The scene has often been used to exemplify the novel's most radical moments, where

the narrative literally takes the reader down into the very filth that capitalism not only sustains

but produces.

The reader is not a passive witness to 'our friends' John Barton and George Wilson's

entrance into the cellar, but an active participant in the scene as the use of the second person

narration indicates.[509] The description is rich in detail and formed as a direct contrast to the poor,

but clean position of the Bartons in the tea party scene. There, too, the window dressings and

hearth are described, although where the Bartons' home is full of wholesome light, 'possessed

---

[506] Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, pp. 13-15.
[507] *Ibid.* p. 60.
[508] Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p. 60.
[509] *Ibid.* p. 60.

many conveniences', and constitutes a retreat where the friends could shut out the city, the Davenport cellar is dark, empty, lonely, and unable to keep out the worst contaminants of the street above.[510] The contrast is obvious. And I want to suggest that one of the reasons that the Davenport scene is so effective as a realistic depiction of extreme poverty is because the tea party scene comes first; the preceding scene primes the reader for entering into domestic comforts and easy emotions early on, so that Davenport's wife's distress is all the more potent later.

Now, instead of dodging half-dry washing lines, you dodge heaps of ashes from the overflowing gutter; instead of curtains drawn to keep the friends in, grime and rags cover the window to keep the light out; and where the warmth and light of the Bartons' hearth exudes wholesome good-feeling, the bare, cold fireplace in the cellar illustrates a destitution that is not only absolute, it is alienating. Where the tea-party invites the entrance of others (it is a party after all), your entrance into the Davenport cellar is both an intrusion into Mrs Davenport's misery as well as a mission of mercy. The conditions in the cellar ought to repel the reader's complete sympathy with Davenport. Like the fetid odour emanating from the cellar that nearly bowls the two men over, the rich imagery of the scene disgusts, and from disgust turns into repulsion. Taking Martha C Nussbaum's theory of disgust as it relates to a consciousness of contamination given rise to by an intruding sense of one's animal corporeality (and eventual decay), the novel's rich details repel the reader from the dirty children and the crying woman as well as from the oozing floor and muddy walls. As Nussbaum argues in her book *From Disgust to Humanity* (2010), empathy can overcome if not the impulse to disgust then certainly the propensity to treat objects of disgust as subhuman.[511] Thus, in entering into the circumstances of the Davenport cellar, we must also enter into Mrs Davenport's misery and loneliness.

But the Davenport scene transmits more than feelings of distress, misery and disgust, and the contamination of the Davenport lair leads to the death of George Wilson. I have not yet

---

[510] *Ibid.* pp. 14-15.
[511] Martha C Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 7.

touched on this understanding of dangerous sympathy, where the virtuous behaviours of sympathisers actively put them in harm's way. The dangers posed by ministering to the sick were a real concern in the Victorian period, as is indicated by the many campaigns to sanitize urban housing, and to ward off the diseases endemic to poverty and overcrowding. To that end, the same fate that befalls George Wilson also befalls Argemone in *Yeast* and Alton Locke, and *Bleak House*'s (1853) Esther Somerson only just manages to survive small-pox, which she contracts from the orphan Jo at Tom-All-Alone's. That being said, these novels don't actively discourage either the feelings that sympathy for the poor and ailing gives rise to, nor the impulse to act on those feelings, as Argemone's redemptive death-bed scene and Esther's marriage to Allan Woodcourt make plain.

I want to compare the Davenport cellar in *Mary Barton* to the very different portrayal of Bessy Higgins in *North and South* to make plain my argument about the locus of narrative sympathy shifting away from working-class suffering. I will argue that the contrast between Davenport and Bessy is evidence of the cleaning-up of sympathy on-going in *North and South*, so that sympathy has progressively less to do with the body and material circumstances and more to do with the meeting of the minds. But first it is necessary to state plainly that throughout *North and South* Margaret (like Egremont in *Sybil*) functions as an analogue for the novel's reader, literally entering into new industrial circumstances and transmitting the passions those experiences give rise to onto the reader. This exemplifies Suzanne Keen's conception of the process of reading narrative fiction in *Narrative Empathy* (although whether or not the experience of novelistic sympathy actually does translate into real altruism is well beyond the scope of my study). The imagined entrance into difficult or uncomfortable circumstances that caused so much concern for readers of *Mary Barton* is crucially circumscribed by Margaret's class status. There is little that is entirely new in her lived experience, and her emotional experiences are always being modified in her judgement as a part of the omniscient narration, so that her feelings are 'judged' before they have the opportunity to manifest in the reader. I also want to suggest

that Margaret is a particularly inviting sympathetic object for readers to feel into because she

functions the same way as Smith's generous spectator does, which I described in chapter one.

There, I demonstrated how Smithian sympathy displaces the feelings of the spectator away from

the object of real suffering and onto other, safer, spectators, especially those that perform the

actions associated with socially formative benevolence. And in *North and South* Margaret and

Thornton both perform personal benevolence so that their altruism confers pleasurable

sympathetic feelings onto readers; readers approve of Margaret and Thornton's activities because

they are right, but are also excused from the responsibility of having to participate in

correspondent activities themselves.

Thus, Margaret's interactions with Bessy—which are distinguished from 'your'

interactions in *Mary Barton*—already go some way to retarding the flow of sympathy toward her,

because Margaret's actions on her behalf satisfy the reader's desire for complete sympathy. But

Bessy's circumstances also manage the sympathetic possibilities of the scene, rendering her far

more compatible with readerly equilibrium and pleasurable feelings than the misery manifested in

the Davenport cellar. First, Bessy is female, which, according to Constance Harsh is not

insignificant when it comes to Victorian sympathetic objects. In *Subversive Heroines* Harsh suggests

that the industrial novels regularly replaced depictions of the male victims of industrialism with

their female counterparts as a way of staving off the underlying threat of violent (re)action.[512]

Not only does her sex constitute Bessy as a safe vessel for Margaret's feelings, but her disease

does too. When Margaret visits the Higginses they describe Bessy's ailment to her: she is dying

from cotton fluff in her lungs, an ailment particular to industrial workers.[513] Because Bessy's

disease is not catching, Margaret's closeness with Bessy poses no danger in that direction and she

can repeatedly minister to Bessy without worry, literally spinning out their relationship over most

of the novel. And, despite the actual material clogging up her lungs, the materiality of Bessy

---

[512] Constance Harsh, *Subversive Heroines: Feminist Resolutions of Social Crisis in the Condition-of-England Novel*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press: 1994), p. 58.
[513] Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 102.

herself is continuously elided. For one thing, by virtue of being an internal complaint, the effects

of illness on Bessy's body are less overt than the animal Davenport's. For another, Bessy's

anticipation of death and an eternal disembodied life to come also resists the language of decay.

In spite of the different ways that *Mary Barton* and *North and South* have been received, the

solution that Gaskell offers to the acrimony between the classes is also relatively consistent from

Mary Barton to *North and South*. When Thornton arrives in London, he explains how his

experiments with the mill have altered his understanding of class relationships:

I have arrived at the conviction that no mere institutions, however wise, and however much
thought may have been required to organise and arrange them, can attach class to class as they
ought to be attached, unless the working out of such institutions bring the individuals of the
different classes into actual personal contact.[514]

While institutional reform might go some way to relieving the immediate misery of the poor,

Thornton's realization is that without 'actual personal contact' mutual animosity perpetuates, and

necessarily vents in violence. Gaskell, like Carlyle, does not see the resolution of the Condition-

of-England question as a final reckoning on the issue of class discontent. When Carlyle writes

that Chartism is a chimera because it is only 'a new name for a thing which has had many names

[and] which will yet have many', he writes that the discontent of the working class is, to some

extent, an unavoidable characteristic of society; what is avoidable, and therefore the real danger

of Chartism, is 'the bitter discontent grown fierce and mad'.[515] Similarly, *North and South* tells us

that Thornton's experiments do not have the 'effect of preventing all future clash of opinion and

action', but that 'when the occasion arose, would […] enable both master and man to look upon

each other with far more charity and sympathy'.[516] Thus, Gaskell also recognizes that class

disputes are inevitable, and that the best result that can be hoped for is to minimize the violence

and hatred that has heretofore accompanied them. Furthermore, Thornton's account of class

reconciliation is steeped in language that comes out of Enlightenment-era descriptions of

---

[514] Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 421.
[515] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 4.
[516] Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 410.

positive social formation. Here, sympathy is both the product of 'actual personal contact' and the stuff which 'attaches class to class as they ought to be attached'.

The end of the novel also shows us how sympathy is the natural, irresistible consequence of close contact, where proximity leads first to loss of resentment, from there to established intercourse, and 'by-and-by' to sympathetic understanding.[517] In the 1869 essay 'The Subjection of Women', which John Stuart Mill penned with Harriet Taylor Mill, Mill coins the phrase 'the insensible contagion of feeling' to describe the ways in which the sustained close contact between man and wife results in the unconscious sharing of feelings between them.[518] As I noted in chapter one, Mill was heavily influenced by the teachings of David Hume (by way of his father and Jeremy Bentham) which sheds light on his relatively late deployment of contagious sympathy as a constructive force. But even where Mill invokes the infectious feelings, he departs from Hume's structure, so the sharing of feeling is not an instantaneous and potentially violent occurrence couched in bodily sensation, but a slow-moving, chronic condition of proximity. Thus, the 'insensible contagion of feeling' provides a useful lens through which to read Thornton's unconscious sympathy with Higgins which develops 'by-and-by'.

Crucially for the working out of Thornton's model mill, there is a link between the shared interest between masters and men in the business sense, and the shared consciousness that they come to experience. In the section above, I have argued that Gaskell's hope at the end of *North and South,* that masters and men can come to recognise their conjoined status, knowingly positions the sympathetic relationships that make such recognition possible as economically productive ones. We can see this arrangement in Higgins' request for employment at Thornton's mill, and in the following scene when the two agree to the terms of their new relationship. At first when Higgins approaches Thornton to ask for work (at Margaret's urging) he offers to communicate freely with Thornton in advance of any future difficulties they may have,

---

[517] Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 410.
[518] John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869), p. 69.

promising 'I'd not speak a word as could do harm, if so be yo' did right by us; and […] I'd promise that when I see'd yo' going wrong or acting unfair, I'd speak to yo' in private first'.[519] Higgins' offer also conforms to Carlyle's understanding of class relations, which suggests that civil disagreement is necessarily cyclical. Thus, Higgins' concession to Thornton is predicated on his ability to access and converse with him *before* unfair treatment morphs discontent into hatred and resentment. Of course, Thornton dismisses this at first, but already the insensible contagion has infected him; he comes to respect and understand Higgins in some measure when he realises that Higgins had waited five hours to make the offer to Thornton. Before Thornton arrives at Higgins' house to make the offer of employment (as his stung pride at the sight of Margaret tells us) the communication between the two men had already begun.

It is worth remarking on that both men must humble themselves, at least in the first instance, to keep the lines of communication open. Where Higgins waits for five hours at the gates of Marlborough Mill, so too must Thornton wait on Higgins in his home. This parallel is the key that unlocks, not only their unconscious sympathies, but also brings to bear the shared interest that the novel highlights. When Thornton sarcastically tells Higgins he ought to leave his brains at home if it will interfere with his (Thornton's) business, Higgins is the first to ascertain the truth: 'I shall need a deal of brains to settle where my business ends and yo'rs begins'.[520]

Finally, in *Mary Barton* the basic structure of the final reconciliation is the same in so far as it is John who first becomes aware of his common interest with Carson, and not the other way around. When John summons Carson to hear him confess to the murder—which conveniently doubles up as his spiritual confession—he finally sees beyond the 'coat' of class distinctions and through to the man beneath: 'rich and poor, masters and men, were then brothers in the deep suffering of their heart; for was this not the very anguish he felt for little Tom?'.[521] Significantly, it is not that the anguish John sees in Carson *resembles* his own anguish for the death of his son;

[519] Gaskell, *North and South*, p. 313.
[520] *Ibid.* p. 319.
[521] Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p. 366.

the anguish Carson's experience *is* John's reproduced exactly. Moreover, this is not accomplished by a Humean unconscious sharing of sentiment, nor is it accomplished by Carson feeling into John's loss, or John feeling into Carson's. John's actions, motivated as they are by the natural progression of resentment into anger into hate, amount to a violent transposition of John's feelings onto Carson, by his reproduction of the actual circumstances that they derive from. These are the sympathetic possibilities that were so troubling to readers of *Mary Barton*. *North and South*'s careful reconstruction of 'actual personal contact' strips sympathy of these dangerous possibilities, so that even while the frame of personal contact is reused, the sympathy that it engenders is purely that of the mind, and not of the body.

It is worth pointing out, however, that this swapping of dangerous bodily sympathy for the safety of mutual understanding, centralizes Enlightenment sympathy in historic 'attitudes *to'* Gaskell's novels, rather than 'attempting to reach' Gaskell's own feelings about sympathy. As I pointed out in chapter one, the narrative that pleasurable 'sympathetic' feelings—given rise to by imaginatively 'entering into' the experiences of a generous spectator—nullify any desire for *real* action on behalf of *real* sympathetic objects both comes directly out of Smith's *Moral Sentiments* and has been seized upon in literary scholarship as a way of explaining the failures of the industrial novels to conceive of a more just socio-political system. There, I argued that this view has effectively reduced the novel to a vehicle of affective exchange only. Even more problematic is the idea that if novels strictly adhered to Smith's sympathetic model, the novels of the Condition-of-England period would be implicated in *sustaining* structural inequalities through their imaginary emotions, rather than weakening structural inequality through any of the other formal techniques we generally associate with social-problem novels (i.e. exposé, the staging of debates on public policy, and, occasionally, explicit campaign messaging). Gone is the notion that novels stressed the responsibility of the state in social inequality and played a significant role in popularizing calls for reform that was key to Cazamian's overview of the period and its literature. This is clearly at odds with not only Gaskell's stated aims, but Carlyle's, Disraeli's,

Trollope's and, as we will see in the Coda, Eliot's. All of the major writers during the Condition-of-England period openly acknowledged that reform of some kind was clearly necessary, and that motivating the sympathetic identification of readers, either with the poor directly, or with reformers, was an important step in achieving meaningful social changes.

There are more problems with transposing Enlightenment sympathy onto the Victorian age than just its effect on literary criticism. First, the centrality of the imagined reader in affective criticism is, perhaps a too enticing echo of the centrality of the impartial spectator in Smith's sympathetic system. But where Smith suggests that the sympathetic experiences of the spectator are rigorously confined by propriety and the quality of original passion, the Victorian feeling-reader was less clearly circumscribed. As I have demonstrated in the first half of this chapter, the Victorian periodical press certainly purported to *know* how literary emotions would manifest in readers, but I am not sure whether criticism can still convincingly make that claim.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, using the Enlightenment frame as the de facto sympathetic system ignores many of the other sympathetic traditions available to the Victorians that did not necessarily couch social responsibility or compassion in the language of propriety, judgement and inaction. This is especially relevant in Gaskell's case where her Unitarian faith informed much of the sympathetic discourse of her fiction. For example, it has long been accepted that Gaskell's Unitarianism is both thematically and structurally significant in the resolution of *Mary Barton.*[522]

Michael Wheeler has demonstrated how Unitarian Christianity in nineteenth-century Britain emphasized a highly individualized approach to faith and biblical interpretation, making it 'virtually impossible to define exactly what those "Unitarian principles" were or to determine precisely how William and Elizabeth Gaskell stood in relation to their fellow Unitarians'.[523] Still, Wheeler has usefully summarized some of the core aspects of the Unitarian faith that tended to

---

[522] Amy Coté, 'Parables and Unitarianism in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*', *Victorian Review*, 40.1, (2014), 59-76, p. 60.
[523] Michael Wheeler, 'Elizabeth Gaskell and Unitarianism', *The Gaskell Society Journal*, vol. 6, (1992), 25-41, p. 26.

be held in common across different chapels. For my purposes here, the most significant of these are (1) that 'the New Testament offers men and women a system of ethics on which every day morality should be based and through which the conscience is trained', and (2) that 'charitable conduct is the outward mark of a true Christian', which, Wheeler argues, accounts for the moralizing tone which Gaskell often adopts in her novels'.[524] Individual charity and the visiting of the poor in particular were Unitarian practices which aligned morality with compassion and show up at key moments in both *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. Thus, perhaps it makes more sense to read the 'entrances' that proliferate in these novels, not as metaphorical substitutions for the imagined entrance into literary feelings, but as the practical dimension of compassion.

---

[524] *Ibid*. p. 27.

Coda: A Breakdown of Sympathetic Distance in *Felix Holt, the Radical*

In my mind, there are two significant reasons to conclude my study of sympathy in the Condition-of-England novels with an exploration of George Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866). The first reason has to do with timing, and the second, with Eliot's reputation for sympathetic realism. But suffice it to say, no study of either the Condition-of-England genre or of Victorian novelistic sympathy would be complete without some reference to the work of George Eliot.

First in the matter of the timeliness of *Felix Holt*, is that the novel is widely considered to be the last of the Condition-of-England genre, just as many critics consider 1867 to be the logical endpoint of the Condition-of-England period. Published just one year before the implementation of the Second Reform Act (1867), the bulk of the novel, like much of Eliot's fiction, is set a generation earlier, during the election of 1833, the first following the Great Reform Act (1832) in which the middle class could vote. Thus, *Felix Holt* reflects on the conventions and transformations of the past from a unique vantage point; it is not just that we read the novel with the gift of hindsight, for many of Eliot's novels build in this device. Rather, *Felix Holt* is set in a time where the political situation closely mirrors the political situation of contemporary Britain during its publication year. This is particularly enticing because mirrors and mirroring are frequently thematized in Eliot's fiction, going back at least as far as the famous chapter in *Adam Bede* (1859) '[i]n which the story pauses a little', as an essential instrument in the drawing out of readerly sympathies.[525] Moreover, Eliot's backward glance at the ill-effects of the First Reform Act on the eve of the Second provides an opportunity to reckon with the issue of our own critical vantage point. Even if such a reading is incapable of fully disentangling what we already know about the end of the scene from critical judgements about the effectiveness of art, and the entropic motion toward democratization, it is still useful to stress how historical

---

[525] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, (London, Penguin Books: 1994), p. 174.

knowledge produces clairvoyant readers, and to address how such presentiments must colour aesthetic judgement.

That the Condition-of-England period and the heyday of the Victorian industrial novel is fixed between 1832 and 1867, and closely aligned with the issue of legislative reform has been generally accepted. Some critics, like Patrick Brantlinger in *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics 1832-1867* (1977), Catherine Gallagher in *The Industrial Reformation of British Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Reform 1832-1867* (1985), and Chris R Vanden Bossche in *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency and the Victorian Novel 1832-1867* (2014) underscore the significance of this date range by indicating the period as an essential consideration, or even a modifier, of their work. This emphasis on periodization might have the unintended consequence of appearing to seal the Victorian novel's interest in reform, or industrialism, or Chartism (respectively) within a span of just thirty-five years. But this date range does have a clear historical significance, especially when foregrounding the growing necessity for social reforms targeting urban poverty, and the bourgeoise's growing awareness of the working class as a group with its own class consciousness and desire for political subjectivity. The period between the Acts, as it were, folds in the passage of the New Poor Law (1834), the rise, peaks and gradual retraction of Chartist activity and the rise of Trade Unionism in its wake, alongside the European revolutions of 1848 and the repeal of the Corn Laws; all of which are familiar milestones for critics of the Condition-of-England genre. That the majority of these events take place in the 1830s, 40s and 50s, and that the other familiar Condition-of-England novels—*Sybil* (1844), *Mary Barton* (1848), *North and South* (1855), *Alton Locke* (1850) and *Hard Times* (1854)—were simultaneously being published in the 40s and 50s, positions *Felix Holt* as something of an outlier in the genre, were it not for its being couched in the issue of electoral reform. In one sense, the novel represents the last effort of the Victorian novelist to link the spirit of reform directly to mimetic representations of class differences and the romantic, if credulous, sanctity of the individual's endeavour to *feel* beyond class boundaries.

Such readings account for Felix's absent radicalism—his argument that the working class needs education before the right to vote, else 'we working men, as a body, run some risk of bringing evil on the nation in that unconscious manner', essentially reworks Carlyle's argument about providing education and the opportunity for emigration in *Past and Present* into a direct address that ventriloquizes Eliot's (or, Carlyle's) voice.[526] In another familiar move, the issue of Esther Lyon's inheritance and marriage literally overtakes the novel's political plot. The election and riot are all over by the halfway mark, and as Felix sits largely off-stage in prison, the narrative works toward a resolution of Esther's moral position and sympathetic awakening. Susan Zlotnick summarizes this substitution 'typical of social-problem novels', writing, '*Felix Holt* enacts the transformations […] that it would like to see in the public sphere' in the private sphere, and 'where Felix's goal of opening a school in Treby fails, he does successfully school Esther'.[527]

But more than this, *Felix Holt*'s position at the very edge of the Condition-of-England period, published more than ten years after *North and South*, might tell us more about critical interventions than it does about the narrative interventions of the Victorian industrial novel. In fact, industry is only at the peripheries of *Felix Holt*, set somewhere beyond the bounds of Treby in Sproxton. True, the novel's centrepiece, the riot after the election, is the result of an influx of unenfranchised Transome supporters—'a considerable number of unadorned heavy navvies, colliers and stonepit men who used their freedom as British subjects to be present in Treby on this great occasion'—and the general disorder, the result of John Johnson's disastrous campaign tactic of buying drink for the workers in exchange for their support.[528] But *Felix Holt*'s narrator seems unwilling or unable to enter into the houses, hearts or minds of this multitude, and does little to prompt the extension of sympathy explicitly in that direction. While the problem of

---

[526] Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 411.
[527] Susan Zlotnick, 'Class Affect and the Victorian Novelist: George Eliot's Gentility and the Origins of Sympathy in *Felix Holt*', *Victorian Review*, (2021), 115-133, p. 125.
[528] Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 256.

working-class discontent and class alienation is certainly portrayed as a social one, as are those old familiar remedies, patience, moral education, sympathetic understanding of others and a mutual responsibility for the well-being of the nation, this hardly develops our understanding of the Condition-of-England period, or its 'structure of feeling', beyond what we already know.[529] In many ways *Felix Holt* defines the limits of a critical discussion instead, and has for many before me, functioned as the culmination of the stagnancy that the political novels of the previous decades cannot help but recommend. Thus, the radical potential of the period finally, fully ebbs and by way of *Felix Holt*, evaporates into nebulousness, notable for the twinned failure of working-class demonstration and of the would-be (even when he wouldn't be) middle-class reformer.

And yet, reading *Felix Holt* allows me to wind down this critical history of the Condition-of-England genre by taking advantage of the perspective shift that it offers. In the act of summing up the rich and varied conceptions of novelistic sympathy open to the early-Victorians, I can read back the other novels through the lens of *Felix Holt*, and inversely, read it through the lens of its predecessors. While there may still be some aspects of Enlightenment sympathy that converge with sympathy as it manifests in *Felix Holt* (i.e. partial versus complete sympathy and a clear relationship between aesthetic form and sympathetic feelings), it must be noted that for the most part, Eliot's conception of sympathy developed, like Gaskell's, out of a different principal tradition. As in the previous chapter, I think attention to the moral philosophers more usefully summarizes the logic at the bottom of the critical suspicion of sympathy in the Victorian social-problem novel, as it becomes increasingly difficult to suggest that the Enlightenment sympathetic frame remained culturally dominant nearly a century after its terms were first articulated by Hume. Therefore, I want to end my discussion of the subject by gesturing toward another sympathetic tradition available to Eliot, that of the German philosopher Ludwig

---

[529] Williams, p. 119.

Feuerbach, in order to suggest how attention to other kinds of sympathy could productively impact our critical practice and view of the Condition-of-England genre as a whole. This is by no means an exhaustive account of Eliot's relationship to novelistic sympathy or continental sympathetic formulations, as that would be another project entirely, but I do think it is useful to explore the limitations of Enlightenment sympathy in the Victorian era alongside contemporary alternatives to its totalising combination of affective transference, critical approbation, and social health.

In the following section, I want to reconsider the notion that 'complete sympathy' in *Felix Holt* fails to resolve the Condition-of-England problem.[530] This is part of a critical vein that suggests sympathy is at best an ineffective strategy for managing class relationships through fiction, or, at worst, a conciliatory deception that deliberately substitutes pleasurable emotions for disagreeable ones. Both of these attitudes are well-served by Smith's sympathetic model, as I explored in chapter one. But neither perspective explicitly engages with other sympathetic traditions, particularly those which proposed first, that the sympathies could be trained through acts of reading, and second, that personal discomfort and exertion were fundamental to complete sympathy in contradiction to the Smithian view. These are two of the characteristics that diverge most drastically from sympathy as it was conceived of by the moral philosophers and are essential to Eliot's philosophy of sympathy as it is articulated in her early work. These are also the issues that I want to keep to the forefront while probing into the ways that *Felix Holt* (1) reworks the inheritance plot that resolves both *Sybil* and *North and South*, (2) reconceives of working-class political self-consciousness through the post-publication 'Address', *à la* Trollope in *Michael Armstrong,* and (3) reimagines the significance of personal contact and emotional labour as Gaskell does. In so doing, I hope to bring together some of the arguments I have made about sympathy as a variable, but essential relationship between subjects, as a vehicle of shared

---

[530] Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 167.

emotion and as a feeling unto itself, that sympathy is at once a quality of artistic engagement and a casualty of critical distance, and that 'sympathy' is used to signal all of these facets individually and in combination.

(I) George Eliot's 'Compete Sympathy' and Parsing the Critical Dissatisfaction with *Felix Holt*

To take a running start at *Felix Holt*, I think it useful to track the development of Eliot's theory about the relationships between sympathy, morality, art and the real across her early work, to help clarify critical disappointment in the ending of that novel, and of the Condition-of-England period. One of the great realists of the nineteenth century, Eliot's belief in sympathy as a moral obligation to others which could be trained through engagement with the text, as well as her use of narrative omniscience as a formal device for directing reader sympathies, continue to dominate in criticism of her fiction.[531] However, critical awareness of Eliot's interest in sympathetic identification has not necessarily resulted in critical sympathy toward the 'problems' in *Felix Holt*. Recently, Allison Booth argued that the convergence of Felix's didactic aspirations and the thorny question of working-class suffrage with Esther Lyon's inheritance plot could not be resolved into a 'coherent' novel.[532] Booth's conclusions in this respect are not that different to Williams's observations about *Felix Holt* which I referenced in the introduction; Williams writes *Felix Holt* is an 'inadequate […] attempt at a position,' and Eliot 'fails in the extension which she knows to be necessary'.[533] He argues that the novel's personal relationships fail to satisfyingly map onto its corresponding social relationships, and neither Esther's marriage to Felix and renunciation of her claim to the Transome estate, nor Felix's determination to live by his labour, rather than as a 'doctor on horseback', results in the meaningful class reconciliation the other

---

[531] Christina Richieri Griffin, 'George Eliot's Feuerbach: Senses, Sympathy, Omniscience, and Secularism', *ELH*, 84.2, (2017), 475-502, p. 475.
[532] Booth, qtd. in Zlotnick, 'Class Affect', p. 116.
[533] Williams, pp. 118-19.

Condition-of-England novels try to gesture toward.[534] Indeed, in broad social terms, by the end

of the novel, it is as if nothing happened at all: Felix continues in his reforming project which has

had little success thus far, and the Transome family, after a period of absence, return to

Transome Court where Mrs Transome lives until her death. No property changes hands, no

schools are built, no worker's sympathies are awakened by Felix's speeches, and no readerly

compassion is explicitly directed toward them. Rather, the novel's major change occurs within

Esther.

Nominative determinism has always been an issue for the Condition-of-England novels,

and well-documented changes to titles have sparked no end of speculation about how this

knowledge affects the scope and reception of the novels themselves. Reams have been written

about Chapman and Hall's recommendation to retitle Gaskell's first novel after the daughter,

rather than after her 'hero' John.[535] The same goes for Dickens's suggestion to change the title of

Gaskell's 1855 novel from her preference, 'Margaret Hale', to *North and South*. And in chapter

two I suggested that part of the reason literary criticism has struggled to read *Sybil* as a tale of

class unification through the marriage plot is because it is named for the wrong character. There,

I argued that the novel ought to have been titled after its actual protagonist, Egremont, and that

Disraeli's decision to name it after his love interest instead has gone some way to shifting the

resolution of the plot away from Egremont's sympathetic *bildungs* and toward Sybil's too-

convenient inheritance. Here, I also want to suggest that many of the critical difficulties

presented by *Felix Holt*'s political plot are exacerbated because it is named for the would-be

radical, rather than the novel's actual protagonist, Esther, whose sympathetic awakening, I argue,

comprises the novel's central reformation.

---

[534] Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 349.
[535] Elizabeth Gaskell, Letter to Miss Lamont (5 Jan 1849), in *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. by J A V Chapple and Arthur Pollard, (Manchester, Manchester University Press: 1966), p. 69.

This should not be taken as a suggestion that the novel is somehow apolitical because its focus is on Esther, the domestic troubles of women, and sympathetic feeling, which of course would go some way to reasserting the double standard of *Desire and Domestic Fiction* that more recent critical trends have worked so hard to avoid. Rather, it is to acknowledge Felix Holt and his pretensions to radicalism as something of a red herring. It is no secret that Felix's view on the central issue political radicals were usually concerned with, namely universal male suffrage, leaves something to be desired. Likewise, it is well known that Felix is 'less a radical than a reformer bent on reshaping the identities of both the middle and working classes', which we can see in his mirrored speeches to the Sproxton men and to Esther.[536] But I disagree with the notion that Felix's non-radicalism indicates a failure of the novel to achieve its aims, or a failure of George Eliot to 'extend [that] which she knows to be necessary'. Taken at face value, this assessment of *Felix Holt* implies that for the novel to be a success, it ought to foreground sympathetic identification with working-class suffering, and ignores the sympathy that the novel explicitly extends in other directions, especially that which is afforded to middle-class Harold Transome.

In this way, *Felix Holt* is something of an anomaly when compared to the other Condition-of-England novels. Where the other novels in this study were deeply invested in either directing sympathy toward working-class bodies, as in the case of Michael Armstrong and John Barton, or in modelling the properly directed sympathies of the middle-class reformer, as is the case for Charles Egremont and Margaret Hale, *Felix Holt* takes an altogether different approach to framing Esther's sympathetic awakening. For this reason, I think it worth pausing to consider the philosophical foundations of Eliot's conception of 'complete sympathy' and how they diverge from those of the moral philosophers.

Just as no study of sympathy in the Condition-of-England novel would be quite complete without reference to George Eliot, no study of Eliot's ethos would be quite complete

---

[536] Zlotnick, p. 116.

without reference to her famous observation in 'The Natural History of German Life' (1856),

'the greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of

our sympathies'.[537] Though Eliot is inclusive of all art in her description, for my purposes the

novel becomes the site of exchange, wherein the artist's exertions are repaid by the reader's

'extension'. For many, this sentence articulates what would become the framework of her

novels, that it is the responsibility of the artist to faithfully represent, and the duty of the reader

to extend our sympathies to both the artist, and to the people whom art represents. But to fully

grasp Eliot's meaning and treatment of the relationship between sympathy and art, I think it's

useful to look at this sentence in context:

> Our social novels profess to represent the people as they are, and the unreality of their representations is a grave evil. The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is a part [sic.] from themselves, which may be called the raw material of the moral sentiment.[538]

Here, Eliot is responding to the use of the 'popular chorus' in opera, in which we allow for a

little unreality in the pastoral peasants because their idealization is 'surely too frank to be

misleading'.[539] But Eliot quickly shifts to considering the obligation that novels have, particularly

social novels, to accurately represent 'the people', among whom she casts 'colliers', 'charwomen'

and 'stocking-weavers'.[540] This is worth remarking on because in 1856 Eliot had not yet begun

writing fiction herself and would not until *Scenes of Clerical Life* in 1858; but as many have pointed

out, this judgement in 'The Natural History' shows that Eliot was already developing her

'doctrine of sympathy' well before becoming 'a great artist' herself.[541] To put a finer point on it,

---

[537] Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in *The Essays of George Eliot*, ed. by Nathan Sheppard, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883), p. 145.
[538] *Ibid.* p. 145.
[539] *Ibid.* p. 145.
[540] *Ibid.* p. 145.
[541] Thomas A Noble, qtd. in 'Introduction to *Scenes of Clerical Life*', p. 15.

this passage indicates Eliot's consciousness that 'the people' include not only the pastoral peasantry and artisans of her earliest fiction, but also figures that had already become recognizable in the Victorian social-problem novel: the industrial working class, the dispossessed weaver and the 'undeserving' poor. Furthermore, Eliot comes to this conclusion by the mid-50s, during the aforementioned heyday of the Victorian industrial novel and more than ten years before penning *Felix Holt*.

Before moving on to the representative tools Eliot uses to cultivate sympathy, and the demands that she makes of her readers, I also want to acknowledge her references to sympathy and the moral sentiments. I don't want to over-emphasize the significance of the terms that are shared between Eliot and the moral philosophers, as I feel this might imply that there are more significant overlaps in their sympathetic theories than can be substantiated. However, it is important to acknowledge the connection between sympathy and ethics that Eliot, Hume, and Smith hold in common. I also want to emphasize Eliot's construction of the sympathies as at once telescopic, active and deliberate. While these qualities echo those Smith attributes to the sympathetic process—he also writes that sympathy is an *active* process wherein the spectator telescopically *feels into* the circumstances of the sufferer culminating in moral judgement—it is worth commenting on the very different character of these qualities in Eliot's formulation. In the following paragraphs, I will explore some of the ways in which Eliot's understanding of sympathy diverges from that of the moral philosophers; primarily in that Eliot's frame foregrounds the role of sometimes painful exertion and critiques the unachievable critical distance at work in Smith's impartial spectator.

First, Eliot is much more explicit about the complicated relationship between art and the cultivation of the moral sentiments than either David Hume or Adam Smith. Indeed, in the segment of 'German Life' quoted above, Eliot's oblique construction points to some of that complexity. On one hand, as a 'benefit […] to the artist', 'sympathy' suggests that the reader

ought to make allowances for some deficiencies in artistic representations; to extend one's sympathies to the artist is therefore to read generously. On the other hand, the extension of 'our sympathies' is that which is *owing* to the artist. We as readers exchange our sympathetic understanding for their art. Thus, Eliot's understanding of sympathy comprises both the representational responsibilities of the writer, and the reader's obligation as a debt of gratitude to the artist. It is a moral imperative that bridges the gap between fiction and the real; in Griffin's words, 'Eliot's edict appears unambiguous: represent ordinary people with realism and you will spark sympathy, thus exercising the highest ethical potential fiction has to offer'.[542]

This brings us to my final point about Eliot's 'Natural History', that 'our sympathies' are extensible. They are a deliberate method of 'good' reading, but they also stretch us beyond ourselves. According to Eliot, readerly sympathies must be cultivated and drawn out, not by 'generalizations and statistics' (which Carlyle also describes as checks to genuine understanding in *Chartism*), but by careful 'attention' to 'human life'.[543] Such a 'picture', she writes, 'surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is a part from themselves' and is the 'raw material of the moral sentiment'. There are two ways to read this phrase, both of which I think are key to understanding Eliot's sympathetic project. 'A part from' collapses together both that which is *apart* from, or distant from reader experience, as well as what is a part *of* them. This turn of phrase joins the critical aspects of novelistic sympathy that make Eliot's sympathy distinct from Smith's. For Smith, differences in class consciousness, lived experience and propriety all function as a check to complete sympathy. For Eliot in contrast, critical distance and experiential difference can be *overcome* by active, extensible sympathy, so that the moral sentiment can be directed toward anyone rather than only at those who already resemble the self.

---

[542] Griffin, p. 475.
[543] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 9.

Readerly sympathy is the by-product of great art then because great art brings the reader into closer communion with those otherwise distant from the self.

In her article on the subject, Christina Richieri Griffin has argued that much of the philosophical basis for Eliot's understanding of sympathy is derived from Ludwig Feuerbach's work *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), which Eliot translated into English in 1854.[544] Principally, Griffin suggests that Eliot's 'fellow-feeling' 'never shakes off the centrality of sensory feeling', so that Eliot's sympathy is distinctly embodied and grounded in the human experience.[545] This, however, ought not diminish the significant interactions between sympathy as an ethical system, and ethics as a discipline with theological underpinnings which also manifested in Eliot's early fiction, particularly in *Scenes of Clerical Life*.

One of the key passages from *Scenes* that illuminates the process by which art enables sympathy comes from 'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story'. The second story in the series Eliot wrote for *Blackwood's Magazine*, 'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story', narrates the circumstances through which Maynard Gilfil, then vicar of Shepperton, came to marry Caterina, the ward of Cheverel Manor. Before finally agreeing to marry Gilfil, Caterina was first the lover to Captain Wybrow, the nephew of her benefactor and heir to Cheverel manor. Eventually, Wybrow jilts Caterina so that he might marry an heiress instead. When Wybrow is later found dead, Caterina confesses to Gilfil that when the affair ended it had been her first impulse to kill him, and then her second impulse to kill herself. To ease her suffering, Gilfil reassures Caterina that god has an infinite capacity for forgiveness,

Our thoughts are often worse than we are, just as they are often better than we are. And God sees us as we are altogether, not in separate feelings or actions, as our fellow-men see us. We are always […] thinking better or worse of each other than we deserve, because we only hear and see separate words and actions. We don't see each other's whole nature. But God sees.[546]

---

[544] Griffin, p. 477.

[545] *Ibid.* p. 476.

[546] Eliot, *Scenes*, p. 235.

Essentially, Gilfil tells Caterina that god has the capacity to forgive her sins because he can see the whole of her nature, rather than the extremities of ambition, or the limitations of action. Here, it is tempting to read god's expansive sight that reveals the whole of human nature as a parallel to the expansion of sight that fiction is able to offer. And this is far from the only time in Eliot's early fiction that formal omniscience, or the view of the whole of human nature, complemented her theories about the ethical implications of sympathy. Indeed, the most famous narrative digression in *Adam Bede* that articulates the moral obligations of realism, is occasioned by a pause to review the whole of Mr Irwine's character. Taken literally, reading the social novel can be an act of devotional practice, a sort of *imitatio dei*, wherein the reader is granted the opportunity to see the whole of a character's nature, not just their words or actions, as we are unable to penetrate beyond in real life. Reading is an opportunity to become closer to god by attempting, in our limited human capacity, to become infinitely sympathetic as god is. However, Griffin identifies the limits to this approach, writing,

Sympathy has long been entangled with omniscience due to an often-tacit assumption that knowing results in feeling […] rather than figuring omniscience only as a catalyst of or hinderance to sympathetic exchange, Feuerbach and Eliot invert these paradigms by pinpointing sensory sympathy as the more productive starting point, and thus envisioning how fellow feeling generates a capacious and seemingly limitless point of view. Each person's sensory sympathy, that is, functions as a wellspring for omniscience.[547]

Thus, it is not omniscience which results in greater sympathy, but sympathy that results in omniscience, and man does not imitate god, but religion 'functions to reflect humanity onto God'.[548] The import of Griffin's observation is that Eliot's complete sympathy is not located outside of human perception which might render it purely aspirational. Rather, sympathy is a particularly human quality that is retroactively attributed to external forces (in Eliot's case, god, or the Enlightenment case, the knowable universe).

---

[547] Griffin, p. 477.
[548] *Ibid.* pp. 476-77.

The case for the centrality of the human experience in sympathy is further made in the final story in *Scenes*, 'Janet's Repentance', when the omniscient narrator describes the 'whole' of Mr Tryan's character. Here, the narrator tells us that 'the bird's eye glance of a critic' might be able to parse all that made Tryan an imperfect man, 'but I am not poised at that lofty height. I am on the level and in the press with him, as he struggles his way along the stony road, through the crowd of unloving fellow-men'.[549] In this scene, the 'stream' of narrative sympathy flows toward Tryan not in spite of the critical distance through which his faults can be observed, but rather because the narrator is, like the rest of us, 'in the press with him'. The narrator makes no pretensions to see the whole of Tryan's nature from a distant 'lofty height', but feels along with Tryan's very human struggles.

Finally, the above statement from 'The Natural History' prefigures what would become a characteristic theme in Eliot's fiction, 'the difficulty of genuine sympathy'.[550] In his chapter on sympathy and aesthetics, Marc Redfield writes that for Eliot 'sympathy requires effort' and that 'a sympathetic education thus consists of a check to the self, resulting in a self-overcoming figured as growth or expansion'.[551] Redfield is not writing about the sympathetic awakening of Esther Lyon in this chapter, however, I think that his summation is productively illustrated by *Felix Holt*. Esther's moral conversion from a 'petty creature' with 'petty desires' into a woman whose 'passion' and 'reverence for the rarest goodness […] were growing into a necessity for action, rather than a resolve to act,' is the crux of this novel's edifying agenda.[552] This 'self-correcting motive' is spurred, of course, by Felix's criticism of Esther, and crucially, it is also framed as a 'painful effort […] which would place her in complete sympathy with Felix Holt'.[553] And this, I think, is where some of disappointment in *Felix Holt* stems from. Esther's sympathetic

---

[549] Eliot, *Scenes*, p. 322.
[550] Marc Redfield, 'George Eliot's Telepathy Machine', in *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press: 2018), p. 142.
[551] *Ibid*. p. 142.
[552] Eliot, *Felix Holt*, p. 109, p. 377.
[553] *Ibid*. p. 167.

awakening does not produce 'right' political knowledge as Egremont's does in *Sybil*. Nor does Esther arrive at a deep sympathy of feeling with the conditions of the working class, as is prompted in Gaskell's *Mary Barton*.

By the novel's end, Esther makes the choice that no longer seems difficult. She realizes that 'in accepting Harold Transome she left the high mountain air, the passionate serenity of perfect love forever behind her'.[554] Her achievement of complete sympathy with Felix Holt, while framed as a painful effort in the first instance, becomes the easy, really the only, choice in the end. By this point in the novel Esther's sympathetic awakening has already been accomplished and her 'knowledge and reflection about the dispossession of these Transomes' is evidence of her transformed nature.[555] In the end, *Felix Holt* is less concerned by the suffering of the working class, and much more interested in the maintenance of traditional filial relationships. For this reason, we might read Mrs Transome's suffering, unseen by her own, ambitious son, as a metaphor for the gentry's loss of (what Disraeli might call) traditional rights and privileges, unseen by the ambitious middle class in the wake of electoral reform.

(II) Reflections and Refractions

I began this study by suggesting that the Condition-of-England novels were a useful lens through which to assess the influence of the sympathetic formulations of David Hume and Adam Smith which have recently come to dominate in studies of the Victorian novel. Sympathy as a natural framework for the construction of equally natural human relationships came out of the Enlightenment already as a process of moderation; in spite of the egalitarian potentiality of Hume's contagious emotions, which would come to represent the dangerous, unsocial passions

---

[554] *Ibid.* p. 359.
[555] *Ibid.* p. 307.

of the crowd, David Hume and Adam Smith bequeathed a theory of sympathy that stressed its

civilising ends. Human society, they argued, was categorically improved by a network of

sympathetic emotions that encouraged moral actions through public approbation. However,

according to Smith, this approbation need not transform into benevolent performance. The

pleasure that attends complete sympathy, derived from the consciousness that there is another

spectator whose feelings toward an object of suffering accords exactly with our own judgement

of the miserable object, is an end unto itself; for Smith, sympathy is a process in the mind, and

entails no obligation to *do*.

The obligation to a sympathy of activity and a process of self-identification that

foregrounded the universality of the human condition, rooted as it is in the body, was the major

development offered by Thomas Carlyle. His scepticism of the moral philosophers in general

and of the atheistic logic of David Hume specifically, did not prevent Carlyle's reimagining of

emotional contagion, or the physical sensations that undergird the sympathetic process and

evidence its action. My turn toward the *French Revolution* as it came to be understood by British

thinkers and novelists, is enabled by the work of others that have shown how the virality in-built

in Hume's theory of sympathy was turned against the spectre of the mob, so that sympathy itself

took on new and dangerous connotations. This threat and Carlyle's view that sympathy ought to

be a precursor to action, point to the potential liberalisation of sympathy in the early stages of

nineteenth-century thought. However, I have argued that these possibilities were tamped down,

in part by reassertions of the Enlightened-imagined sympathy of pro-social construction—

Disraeli's *Sybil* is one novel that does this, as is *North and South*—and by negative responses to the

sympathetic form of the Condition-of-England novels that increasingly drew impermeable

boarders around artistic emotions and public knowledge—as in the twinned cases of *Michael*

Armstrong and *Mary Barton*.

The reclaiming of sympathy for productive social relationships is enacted in *Sybil* through

Disraeli's prioritisation of the English national identity. There, his 'right understanding of history'

amounts to a sympathetic version of Andersonian 'thinking the nation', wherein Egremont's promise is not only an effect of the futurity his marriage to Sybil represents but is also framed as the fitting continuation of the immemorial English past.[556] As such, sympathy begets the nation, and the social problems facing Victorian England might be overcome if only readers could learn to think sympathetically about their own place in an infinite timeline of English national history.

Taking another tack and engaging with the more radical possibilities that sympathy seemed to offer are Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* and Gaskell's *Mary Barton*. Both works seat at least some of the narrative's energies in the vivid experiences of working-class figures, and both novels suffered some abuse in the periodical press for this prime focus. One thread that I have returned to throughout this study is the question of how we read the Condition-of-England novels today and how much of our modern critical inheritance is a function of how these novels were engaged with in the past. Placing pre-publication adverts for *Michael Armstrong* within the discourse around social-problem writing illuminates the structures through which Victorian writers dealt imagined blows to corrupt institutions; these writers thought of their activities not as a substitution for needful reform, but as a stimulus to it. That their writing should be motivated by sympathy for the vulnerable was not considered problematic as such by contemporary reviewers. Rather, I have argued that what Victorian critics found problematic in these narratives—the idea that these novels misdirected their sympathies and manifested conditions that middle-class readers at their ease would be discomfited by—is born out of Enlightenment sympathetic formulations of sympathy and feeling that were fundamentally conservative in nature. I also suggest that some of the received wisdom about the Condition-of-England novels is a direct result of these strong contemporary reactions to working class embodied suffering, so that *Michael Armstrong* must continuously be recovered from the obscurity

---

[556] Anderson, p. 11.

foisted upon it, and *Mary Barton*'s radical entrance into working-class suffering is a promise unfulfilled by *North and South*.

By the time that Gaskell's second industrial novel was being published, strict adherence to Smithian sympathy tells us that sympathy need no longer be an uncomfortable experience for readers otherwise at their ease, as they could feel through Margaret's generosity, rather than directly with the embodied suffering of Bessy Higgins or John Barton. However, Gaskell's industrial novels also begin to show the difficulty with mapping Enlightenment sympathetic forms directly onto the Victorian novel, as Gaskell's sympathy clearly begins to manifest outside of the imagined entrance into character feeling. To make a stronger case for the limitations of Enlightenment sympathy, I have concluded my study by reading George Eliot's *Felix Holt* in light of the alternative sympathetic tradition she theorizes in *Scenes of Clerical Life*. The working class, hardly drawn at all in this novel, is not the site of Eliot's sympathetic feelings, but Esther, endeavouring to understand the men around her, is. What these readings of Gaskell and Eliot point to are just a few of the other sympathetic traditions at work in the Victorian era. I have included these as a means of suggesting that literary scholarship could think more critically about the appeal of Smithian inactive sympathies, and whether the recent dominance of the Enlightenment frame tends to confirm our worst suspicions about the social-problem novel, rather than add complexity to the interactions between individual feeling, aesthetic form and social responsibility.

The question of novelistic sympathy in social-problem novels, how we manage the empathetic feelings that texts elicit with the narrative pushes toward compassionate inactivity continues to be a knotty question and could be usefully expanded upon in a few directions. One might consider some of the other less familiar industrial novels like *Michael Armstrong* and how their imaginary feelings contributed, or didn't, to their non-appearance in the classic Condition-of-England set. These might include Tonna's *Helen Fleetwood* which was serialised almost concurrently with *Michael Armstrong*, and Geraldine Jewsbury's *Marian Withers*, which was

unfavourably grouped with Trollope, Disraeli and Gaskell's industrial novels by *The Leader* in 1855. Another direction for expansion of this study might diverge from the Condition-of-England, and think through the condition of the empire, by placing these novels alongside other contemporary works to think about how novelistic sympathy might look different outside of the metropole and when there are more identities at work than gender and class.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Books:

Burke, Edmund, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol 3, (London, John C Nimmo, 1883)

Carlyle, Thomas. 'Chartism', in *Chartism and Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858)
—— 'Past and Present' in *Chartism and Past and Present*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858)
——*The French Revolution: A History*, ed. by John D Rosenberg, (New York: Modern Library 2002)
——'Signs of the Times', in *The Works of Thomas Carlyle in Thirty Volumes*, XXVII, ii, 'Critical and Miscellaneous Essays', (London: Chapman and Hall)

Cobden, John C, *The White Slaves of England*, *with Twelve Spirited Illustrations*, (Auburn and Buffalo: Miller Orton and Mulligan, 1854)

Dickens, Charles, 'A Christmas Carol', in *A Christmas Carol, The Chimes and The Cricket on the Hearth*, ed. by Katherine Kroeber, (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004)
——*Oliver Twist: Or, the Parish Boy's Progress*, ed. by Phillip Horne, (London: Penguin Books, 2003)
Disraeli, Benjamin, *Coningsby*, (Stroud: Nonsuch Publishing, 2007)
——*Sybil: Or, the Two Nations*, ed. by Sheila Smith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
——'General Preface', in *Collected Edition of the Novels and Tales of Benjamin Disraeli*, vol. 1, (London: Spottiswoode and Co, 1875)

Eliot, George, *Adam Bede*, (London: Penguin Books, 1994)
——*Felix Holt, the Radical*, ed. by Dinny Thorold, (Ware, Wordsworth Classics, 1997)
——'The Natural History of German Life', in *The Essays of George Eliot*, ed. by Nathan Sheppard, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883)
——*Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. by David Lodge, (London: Penguin Books, 1985)

Gaskell, Elizabeth, *Mary Barton*, ed. by Macdonald Daly, (London: Penguin Books, 2003)
——*North and South*, ed by Patricia Ingham, (London: Penguin Books, 2003)

Hume, David, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, (London: A Millar, 1751)
——*A Treatise of Human Nature,* ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/342 [accessed 24 Sept 2020]

Kingsley, Charles, *Yeast: A Problem*, (Phoenix Mill, Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994)

Malthus, Thomas, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, (London: Reeves and Turner, 1878)

Mill, John Stuart, *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*, (London: John W Parker, 1844)

——*The Subjection of Women*, (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869)

Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor and Jones, 1818)

Smiles, Samuel, *Self-Help: with Illustrations of Character, Conduct and Perseverance*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1878)

Smith, Adam, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, Books I-III*, ed. by Amartya Sen,   (London: Penguin Books, 1999)
——*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by Ryan Patrick Hanley, (London: Penguin Books, 2009)

Trollope, Frances Milton, *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw, or Scenes on the Mississippi*, (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1836)
——*The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy*, (London: Henry Colburn, 1844)

Trollope, Thomas Adolphus, *What I Remember, in Two Volumes*, (London: Bentley and Son, 1887)

Letters and Diary Entries:

Carlyle, Thomas, 'Letter from Thomas Carlyle to the Author of *Mary Barton'*, 8 November 1848, (Duke University Press, 2019), carlyleletters.dukepress.edu, [accessed 31 Oct 2019]

Dickens, Charles, 'Diary Entry, 8 February 1839', in *The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. I: 1820 – 1839*, ed. by   Madeline House   and Graham Storey, *Pilgrim edn*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965)
——'Letter to Lord Anthony Ashely-Cooper, 19 December 1838', in *The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. I: 1820 – 1839*, ed. by Madeline House and Graham Storey, *Pilgrim edn*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965)
——'Letter to S Laman Blanchard 9 February 1839', in *The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. I: 1820 – 1839*, ed. by   Madeline House and Graham Storey, *Pilgrim edn*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965)

Gaskell, Elizabeth, 'Letter to Edward Chapman, 1 January 1849', in *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. by J A V Chapple and Arthur Pollard, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966)
—— 'Letter to Miss Lamont, 5 January 1849', in *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. by J A V Chapple and Arthur Pollard, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966)
—— 'Letter to Lady Kay Shuttleworth, 16 July 1850', in *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, ed. by J A V Chapple and Arthur Pollard, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966)

Periodical Book Reviews and Adverts

Advert for *Michael Armstrong*, in *Examiner*, (3 February 1839)

Advert for *Michael Armstrong,* 'New Readerships', in *John Bull,* (10 February 1839), no 948

Advert for *Michael Armstrong,* 'New Readerships', in *John Bull,* (24 March 1839), no 954

Review of *Michael Armstrong*, in *Cleave's Penny Gazette of Variety*, (23 March 1839), no 24

Review of *Michael Armstrong*, in *Athenaeum*, (London: James Holmes, 10 August 1839), pp. 587-590

Review of *Michael Armstrong*, in *Bolton Free Press*, 22 February 1840, qtd. in William Chaloner, 'Mrs Trollope and the Early Factory System', *Victorian Studies*, (1960), 4.2, pp. 159-66

Review of *Mary Barton*, in *British Quarterly Review*, (1 February 1849), 9. 17, 117-136

Review of *Mary Barton*, in *Manchester Guardian*, (17 February 1849)

Review of *Mary Barton*, in *Westminster Review*, April – July 1849, (London: George Luxford), vol. LI, pp. 48-63

Review of *North and South*, in *Fife Herald, Kinross, Strathearn and Clackmannan Advertiser*, (Cupar, 18 January 1855), 1767, *British Library Newspapers, Part V: 1746-1950, GALE*, [accessed 3 September 2019]

Review of *North and South*, in *The Leader*, (14 April 1855), vol. VIII, no. 264, ncse.ac.uk/periodicals/l/issues [accessed 4 July 2019

'The Story of *Mary Barton*', *The Eastern Weekly Leader*, (10 August 1895)

Secondary Sources

Books

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities* (London, Verso: 1996)

Althusser, Louis, *Essays in Self- Criticism* (London, New Left: 1976)

Betensky, Carolyn, *Feeling for the Poor: Bourgeois Compassion, Social Action and the Victorian Novel* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010)

Britton, Jeanne M., *Vicarious Narratives: A Literary History of Sympathy, 1750-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)

Cazamian, Louis, *The Social Novel in England, 1830-1850: Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs Gaskell, Kingsley*, trans. by Martin Fido (London: Routlegde and Keegan Paul, 1973)

Fairclough, Mary, *The Romantic crowd; Sympathy, controversy and print culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

Gallagher, Catherine, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985)

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

Guy, Josephine, *The Victorian Social Problem Novel* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996)

Harsh, Constance, *Subversive Heroines: Feminist Resolutions of Social Crisis in the Condition-of-England Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994)

Jaffe, Audrey, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000)

Johnston, Susan, *Women and Domestic Experience in Victorian Political Fiction* (Westport, Greenwood Press: 2001)

Kaplan, Fred, *Thomas Carlyle, A Biography* (London: University of California Press, 1993)

Keen, Suzanne, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Koven, Seth, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006)

Lowe, Brigid, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: An Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London: Anthem Press, 2007)

Ngai, Sianne, *Ugly Feelings*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005),

Nussbaum, Martha C, *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Poovey, Mary, *Making a Social Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995)

Reddy, William, M., *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Rosenberg, John D, *Carlyle and the Burden of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)

Vanden Bossche, Chris R., *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency and the Victorian Novel 1832 – 1867* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014)

Walton, John, *Chartism* (London: Francis & Taylor, 1999)

Williams, Raymond, *Culture and Society* 1780-1950 (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1971)

Zlotnick, Susan, *Women, Writing and the Industrial Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)

Book Chapters and Sections

Brantlinger, P. and Thesing, William B., 'Introduction', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 1-7

Debes, Remy, 'Adam Smith and the Sympathetic Imagination', in *Adam Smith: His Life, Thought and Legacy*, ed. by Ryan Patrick Hanley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 192-208

Evensky, Jerry, 'The Wealth of Nations', in *Adam Smith: His Life, Thought and Legacy*, ed. by Ryan Patrick Hanley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 67-89

John Gibson, 'Empathy', in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 234-247

Hammond, Meghan Marie and Kim, Sue J., 'Introduction', *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-20

Hanley, Ryan Patrick, 'The Eighteenth-Century Context of Sympathy from Spinoza to Kant', in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by E. Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 171-198

Hüber, Karolina, 'Spinoza's Parallelism Doctrine and Metaphysical Sympathy', in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by E. Schliesser, (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2015), pp. 146-70

Moyer, Ann, E., 'Sympathy in the Renaissance', in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by E. Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 70-101

Redfield, Marc, 'George Eliot's Telepathy Machine', in *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press: 2018)

Robson, C., and Christ, Caroline T., 'Literacy, Publication and Reading', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Vol E, 'The Victorian Age', pp. 1017-1883

Rose, Jonathan, 'Education, Literacy and the Victorian Reader', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 31-47

Rothschild, E. and Sen, A., 'Adam Smith's Economics' in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 319-365

Schliesser, Eric, 'Introduction', in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by E. Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 3-14

Sen, Amartya, 'Introduction' to *The Wealth of Nations, Books I-III*, by Adam Smith (London: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 8-96

Journal Articles

Ablow, Rachel, "Victorian Feeling and the Victorian Novel", *Literature Compass*, 4.1, (2007), pp. 298-316

Bederman, Gail, 'Revisiting Nashoba: Slavery, Utopia, and Frances Wright in America, 1818-1826', *American Literary History*, 17.3, (2005), pp. 438-59

Betensky, Carolyn, 'Knowing Too Much and Never Enough: Knowledge and Moral Capital in Frances Trollope's *Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong*', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 36.1, (2002), pp. 61-78

Chaloner, William, 'Mrs Trollope and the Early Factory System', *Victorian Studies*, 4.2, (1960), pp. 159-66

Conary, Jennifer, "'Dreaming Over an Unattainable End": Disraeli's *Tancred* and the Failure of Reform', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 38.1, (2010), pp. 75-88

Coté, Amy, 'Parables and Unitarianism in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*', *Victorian Review*, 40.1, (2014), pp. 59-76

Fyre, Lowell T., "'This Offensive and Alarming Set of Pamphlets": Thomas Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* and the Condition of England in 1850', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, (2012), 45.1, pp. 113-38

Greiner, R., 'Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot and the Realist Novel', *Narrative*, 17.3, (2009), pp. 291-311

Jordan, Alexander, "David Hume is Pontiff of the World: Thomas Carlyle on Epicureanism, Laissez-Faire, and Public Opinion", *Journal of British Studies,* 56. 3, (2017), pp. 557-579

Lee, Michael Parrish, 'Gaskell's Food Plots and the Biopolitics of the Industrial Novel', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 47. 3, (2019), pp. 511-539

Longmuir, Anne, 'Consuming Subjects: Women and the Market in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 34.3, (2012), pp. 237-252

MacLure, Jennifer, 'Diagnosing Capitalism: Vital Economics and the Structure of Sympathy in Gaskell's Industrial Novels', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 38.5, pp. 343-352

McCausland, Elizabeth D., 'Dirty Little Secrets: Realism and the Real in Victorian Industrial Novels', *The American Journal of Semiotics,* 9.2, (1992), pp. 149-165

O'Kell, Robert, 'Two Nations, or One? Disraeli's Allegorical Romance', *Victorian Studies*, 30.2, (1987), pp. 211-234.

Oslington, Paul, 'The 'New View' of Adam Smith in Context', *History of Economics Review*, 71:1, (2018), pp. 118-131

Poston, Lawrence, "Millites and Millenarians: The Context of Carlyle's 'Signs of the Times'", *Victorian Studies*, 26.4, (1983), pp. 381-406

Torre, Jose R., "'An Inward Spring of Motion and Action": The Teleology of Political Economy and Moral Philosophy and in Age of the Anglo-American Enlightenment', *Early American Studies*, 8.2, (2010), pp. 646-671

Ulrich, John M, 'Carlyle's *Chartism* and the Politics of the (In)articulate', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 45, (2012), pp. 67-87

Wagner, Tamara S., *Beyond Domestic Manners*: Repositioning Frances Trollope in Literary History, *Women's Writing*, (2011), 18.2, 153-166

Walton, Susan, 'Industrial Sightseeing and Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy*', *Women's Writing*, (2011), 18.2, pp. 273-292

Wennerlind, Carl, 'The Role of Political Economy in Hume's Moral Philosophy', *Hume Studies*, 37.1, (2011), pp. 43-64

Wheeler, Michael, 'Elizabeth Gaskell and Unitarianism', *The Gaskell Society Journal*, vol. 6, (1992), pp. 25-41

Zlotnick, Susan, 'Class Affect and the Victorian Novelist: George Eliot's Gentility and the Origins of Sympathy in *Felix Holt*', *Victorian Review*, (2021), pp.115-133

Online Resources

Neville-Sington, Pamela, 'Trollope [nee] Milton, Frances [Fanny] (1779-1863) Travel Writer and Novelist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2008) http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27751 [accessed 1 May 2019], 1-8, p. 2-3.