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Silence, Sentimentalism, and the British Romantic Novel, 1789–1824

by

Anna Dodson Saikin

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

Alexander Regier, Chair
Associate Professor of English

Betty Joseph
Associate Professor of English

Leo Costello
Associate Professor of Art History

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ABSTRACT

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ANNA SAIKIN

My dissertation argues that silence provides a lens through which we can trace the development of the Romantic novel from the eighteenth century novel. In the eighteenth century, anxieties about female selfhood and identity become linked to proper modes of communication that reveal class and/or gender differences that could threaten the social order they were meant to uphold. If performed correctly, it was thought, expressions of sympathy would contribute to the development of sociability by establishing a prescriptive narrative to teach readers how to respond to suffering bodies. The sentimental novel silences female experience and rewrites it into a teleology that can be used for an observer’s emotional and moral advancement. I argue that Romantic novelists including Ann Radcliffe, Walter Scott, Frances Burney, and Jane Austen adapt situations and themes from the sentimental novel to reframe silence as an empowering form of expression that mitigates social and historical anxieties about female selfhood and individuality. As representative authors of the gothic, historical, and domestic novels, Radcliffe, Scott, Burney, and Austen rework silence into a positive exploration of the social implications of sympathy. My dissertation advances a theory of the novel’s development that addresses the relationship between appropriate means of communication and women’s disappearance from the publishing marketplace by reframing silence not as a symptom of female vulnerability but a communication strategy that emerged as a way to overcome repressive market forces.
Following an introduction that situates the popularity of the sentimental novel between the moral ethos set by Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748) and the critical uncertainty faced by women writers, my first chapter investigates settings in Radcliffe’s gothic novels where silence proliferates to show how her heroines overcome their inability to protest their suffering by escaping to sublime landscapes. My second chapter develops the gothic’s critique of sympathy as a social phenomenon through an investigation of visual scenes and moments of aphasia in Scott’s *Bride of Lammermoor* (1819). Building on Scott’s development of the historical novel, my third chapter examines the limitations of class-based sympathetic responses in Burney’s last novel, *The Wanderer* (1814), to show how the protagonist’s refusal to speak about her identity limits her mobility. My fourth chapter concludes my dissertation by examining the impact of Austen’s development of free indirect discourse on the novel’s ability to represent female interiority. Beginning with an investigation of conduct books that advocated reticence as the proper means for women to communicate, I argue that Austen’s development of free indirect discourse permits the reader to see through the artificiality of society’s mannerisms and conversation. When read as a group, these four novelists show the variety of means by which the Romantic novel recuperates silence as a positive form of female self-expression.
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INTRODUCTION

Think, Sir, of what once she was! Would you abandon her to the insults of an unfeeling world, deny her opportunity of penitence, and cut off the little comfort that still remains for your affections and her own!

So speaks Harley, the “Man of Feeling” of Henry Mackenzie’s 1771 novel to the father of a fallen woman.¹ As Harley pleads for Miss Atkins’s father’s compassion, she “fell to the ground, and bathed his feet with her tears.”² In her desperation, she allows Harley to speak the words that she cannot. Harley asks for the father to forgive his daughter’s misfortune “for your affections and her own,” but Mr. Atkins only listens because his daughter remains tearful and silent. Miss Atkins’s response suggests that her unspeakable sorrow not only is a symptom of her distress but also allows her to express her remorse in a socially acceptable way. Eighteenth-century sentimental novels feature many pathetic figures and desperate situations to evoke their readers’ sympathy for the disadvantaged, unfortunate members of British society. *The Man of Feeling* purports to address social and political injustice through Harley’s willingness to speak for the downtrodden, but sentimental novels remain rooted in a superficial experience of sympathy that does little to instigate a desire for true reform. Female characters, such as Miss

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² Mackenzie, p. 93.
Atkins, are silent so that male characters, such as Harley, can interpret their suffering for them, often through increasingly extravagant bodily displays of affected emotion.

The sentimental novel depicts masculine displays of sympathy accompanied by female silence as a benevolent paternal gaze, but does not, in fact, decrease the distance between disparate individuals. Silence can be defined in many ways, but silence in the sentimental novel generally falls into one of two rubrics: actual silence and metaphorical silence. As a noun, actual or realized silence identifies a gap or pause in dialogue, typically caused by a character’s inability or unwillingness to speak. Thus, sentimental narrators will often describe the character’s actions for them, adding commentary to describe any attendant emotions: “She either could not, or would not make any answer to these words,” or “We remained silent, without any sensation of that foolish pain which takes place, when in such a circle you look for ten minutes in one another’s faces without saying a word.”³ At times, a character’s actual silence will be accompanied by nonlinguistic utterances, such as sobs or sighs, that do not register an audible silence in the text but similarly block communication channels or represent narrative pauses. The second type of silence refers to the metaphorical repression of female voices in the novel. Feminist criticism has used the verb form “to silence” to refer to a cultural dismissal of texts written by women that results in the absence or disappearance of women writers (or female voices) from historical records or the literary canon. Both of these rubrics are essential to the historical, social, and aesthetic work my dissertation performs. By using an expansive rather than narrow definition of silence, I hope to provide a more nuanced understanding of its function in Romantic period novels by considering how contemporary readers would have encountered it.

Although there are many ways to examine the sentimental novel, silence provides a lens through which we can trace how the Romantic novel develops from the eighteenth century novel. My dissertation advances a theory of the novel’s development that addresses the conflict between appropriate means of communication and women’s disappearance from the publishing marketplace by reframing silence not as a symptom of female vulnerability, but as a self-conscious inversion that evolved as a way to overcome repressive market forces. In the eighteenth century, anxieties about female selfhood and identity become linked to proper modes of communication that reveal class and/or gender discrepancies that could threaten the moral order they were meant to uphold. If performed correctly, it was thought, expressions of sympathy would contribute to the development of sociability by establishing a prescriptive narrative to teach readers how to respond to suffering bodies. The sentimental novel’s lofty didacticism was often accompanied by affective signs of sympathy, such as blushes, sighs, and tears, and although emotional reactions ostensibly arose from a spontaneous outburst of feeling, they were actually heavily scripted, according to Paul Goring and William M. Reddy, and cultivated along religious, class, and gender boundaries.4

Sentimental novels suggest that women should be taught appropriate ways to communicate, indicating that the novels value the expression of sympathy more than its reception. Instances of silence in sentimental novels represent moments of friction that highlight women’s uncertain position within society, the emerging market economy, and history. The

plight of the sentimental heroine can be seen in that of female novelists who struggled for critical recognition, while male authors such as Mackenzie and Samuel Richardson were praised for their depiction of abject women. One might think that female writers would counter the repression of female speech with more vocal characters, but the popularity of the sentimental novel set an expectation for silent female voices. Closer examination reveals that it is never the hero who silently observes the scene, but rather the subjects he encounters as he reframes and sorts their experiences into a teleology that he can then appropriate for his own emotional and moral self-advancement. Romantic period authors, and particularly female writers, redefine the ethical implications of sympathy while ensuring that their novels were economically viable in a marketplace that denigrated female readers and writers by diverging into other genres such as the gothic, historical, and domestic novel, each of which borrow themes, settings, and even character types from the sentimental novel. Facing anxieties about gender and genre, Ann Radcliffe, Walter Scott, Frances Burney, and Jane Austen rework the plot elements and stylistic techniques of the sentimental novel to reclaim silence as an empowering form of expression instead of a repressive societal mechanism that places limitations on women’s speech.

In their groundbreaking study of nineteenth-century literature, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar set the tone for feminist literary scholarship, and, in particular, for excavating latent silences in fiction and poetry written by women. Gilbert and Gubar observe that “aphasia and amnesia—two illnesses which symbolically represent (and parody) the sort of intellectual incapacity patriarchal culture has traditionally required of women—appear and reappear in women’s writings in frankly stated or disguised forms.” The persistence of these motifs is due to female authors’ absorption of society’s accepted norms
governing women’s behavior. Subsequent critics have expanded Gilbert and Gubar’s evidence to address the ways that novelists used silence to signal their heroine’s opposition to society’s rules of conduct in a form of active resistance. Feminist criticism uses silence as a metaphor to show women’s absence from the publishing marketplace as well as critical debates. My dissertation builds on this line of scholarship by heightening attention to instances of silence within narrative dialogues to show how female speech practices develop across various genres.

For literary historians, the presence of silence in the eighteenth-century novel reveals the gendered division of language and conversation as shown in Nancy Armstrong’s influential *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), a response to Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). Watt’s extensive discussion of Samuel Richardson’s novels foregrounds the “authenticity of its presentation” rather than the “kind or even amount of emotion” his characters exhibit. Armstrong corrects Watt’s omission of female writers such as Jane Austen by attending to the “political” resonances of the novel, specifically the way that male novelists such as Richardson were in conversation with the conduct book and other literature written for women.

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7 Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford and
McKeon’s more recent *The Secret History of Domesticity* (2006) foregrounds the domestic novel within a broader historical framework that puts it into the context of Jürgen Habermas’s public sphere. Alongside Armstrong and McKeon’s recovery and defense of eighteenth-century domestic novels, other feminist literary critics attend to the use of silence within the novels themselves. Patricia Laurence, for example, argues that silence allows women to break through the negativity associated with female expression: “in a reversal of the traditional notion of women’s complicity with oppressive circumstances or cultural exclusion, such silences are viewed as a difference of view, an alternative code of ‘truth’ or, sometimes, an expression of anger—the only kind that would be socially tolerated. Women’s silence, that is to say, may be read as a strategy of resistance and choice—a ritual of truth.” Far from appearing as solely the result of patriarchal control over female voices, silence can invest female speakers with agency when it is self-imposed. Patricia Howell Michelson offers a corollary to this argument when she claims that voice as well as silence can be a metaphor for oppression: “in ordinary language use, silence is by no means always negative, nor voice positive; both silence and voice are employed by competent speakers. Moreover, this dominant metaphor has encouraged us to pity, ignore, or discount the many generations of women for whom silence represented a potentially useful

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strategy.” Michelson implicitly suggests that the silences of the sentimental novel appear in Romantic novels as a choice, rather than a reinforced social expectation. I contend that Romantic novelists made use of the novel’s flexibility to incorporate stylistic techniques such as free indirect discourse that reveal that moments of silence can be more expressive of an individual’s mental state than speech.

Feminist literary scholarship situates silence as part of a larger socio-linguistic landscape that presupposes that the speaker’s gender determines the value of his or her speech. Yet silence also appears as a byproduct of the sublime, an aesthetic category that objectively measures one’s intellectual response to intense emotional experiences. Eighteenth-century philosophers turned to the sublime to understand the limits of the mind’s ability to process sensory information, and twentieth-century critics including Neil Hertz, Jean-François Lyotard, and Alan Richardson have analyzed the relationship between sentiment and the sublime. My argument owes much to Frances Ferguson’s analysis of eighteenth-century poetry and prose in Solitude and the Sublime (1992), in which she identifies the sublime as an introspective response that often results in silence. Ferguson argues that the emergence of discourses of the sublime “marks an intensification of interest in the mental image and in the difficulties of assimilating it to the problems of ontology and epistemology, on the one hand, and to those of ethics, on the other.” An individual’s interior state cannot be divorced from his or her ethical obligation to others.

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Fiona L. Price and Scott Masson’s edited collection, *Silence, Sublimity and Suppression in the Romantic Period* examines the contradictory impulses of sublime silence in that it denotes both “failure and empowerment.”13 The collection brings together analyses of both poetry and prose, without arriving at a unified theory of how to address the appearance of silence in either form.

Anne-Lise François resists what she sees as the privileging of communication in literary analysis and values the “reception of the self-quieting, recessive speech acts and hardly emitted announcements of reports on self of the heroines of the psychological novel” (p. xvi). François argues that Romanticism’s turn to introspection contests the Enlightenment’s focus on the need for sensory proof, which she links to Romanticism’s use of the open secret, a “mode of recessive action that takes itself away as it occurs.”14 Both the open secret and silence appear to represent a nothingness or absence in the text, but upon further investigation actually reveal layers of meaning not found through traditional critiques that place emphasis on demonstrable uses of language. François teases out the value of the unspoken by examining the imbalance of power that derives from linguistic absence and argues that the unveiling of the open secret destabilizes oppressive authority. Adela Pinch links both the sublime and textual absences to the eighteenth century’s preoccupation with emotion, and how affect sometimes substitutes for genuine feeling in Romantic period writings.15 My dissertation takes into consideration silence as a stylistic marker of sentimentalism, but one that presented different opportunities for male and female authors. Before I discuss how silence offers one indication that Romantic period writers reframe

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sentimental discourse in new genres, I will first examine how silence functioned in philosophical enquiries into sympathy to demonstrate its necessity in sentimental exchanges.

The sentimental novel’s use of silence and speech owes much to the philosophical discourse of sympathy, and in particular the work of David Hume and Adam Smith. Both Hume and Smith have their roots in the system of ethics developed by Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, who argues that man is a moral being who, when his parts are in harmony, is peacefully connected with his environs. Hume and Smith expanded and refined Shaftesbury’s *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) by examining more closely the relationship between individuals.\(^{16}\) Sympathy, through our connection with other people, informs our perception of the world, constitutes our identity, and makes it possible to pursue philosophical inquiry, but the inability to completely understand another person alienates us from that very society we wish to protect. Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) locates sympathy as a mediator between solitude and sociability and argues that our capacity to imagine ourselves in another’s place is what separates us as humans.\(^{17}\) For Hume, individual identity is the result of knitting past experiences together to see connections between our multifaceted perceptions. Our capacity for sympathy relies on remembrances of our past recollections: “suppose we could see clearly into the breast of another, and observe that succession of perceptions, which constitutes his mind or thinking principle, and suppose that he always preserves the memory of a considerable part of past perceptions; ’tis evident that nothing cou’d more contribute to the bestowing a relation on this succession amidst all its variations. For what


\(^{17}\) For more on David Hume and sympathy, see Nancy Yousef, *Romantic Intimacy* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2013), pp. 74–81.
is the memory but a faculty, by which we raise up the images of past perceptions?"\textsuperscript{18} Imagination plays a key part of this process, for the only way to conceptualize memory is through visualizing another’s experiences. Our individual memories are what make us independent beings, and our ability to make connections between seemingly disparate senses triggers a chain of events that allows us to not only make sense of our past and present, but also to imagine the future: “our identity with regard to the passions serves to corroborate that with regard to the imagination, by the making our distant perceptions influence each other, and by giving us a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures.”\textsuperscript{19} Our unique capacity to remember not only is the source for our understanding of the world (freeing us to pursue philosophical observations), but also becomes the source of a profound melancholia, because we are limited by language in our ability to express ourselves.

Sympathy provides a way to overcome our isolation as individuals and forms the intellectual background of the sentimental novel. The category of “sympathy” operates in several different spheres, including literature and philosophy, where its importance stems from its relationship to imagination. If one’s imagination cannot encompass another’s experience due to gender, class, or racial differences, then he or she may substitute his or her own feelings in place of another’s. An example of this would be if a male speaker in a sentimental novel anticipates his own thoughts and feelings and repeats this reaction rather than enter into a mutually sympathetic exchange. Hume’s identification of “sentiment” as encompassing a person’s unique thoughts and feelings leads him to lament that the individual feels alienated from society without social discourse: “how must we be disappointed, when we learn, that this connection, tie, or energy lies


\textsuperscript{19} Hume, p. 261.
merely in ourselves, and is nothing but that determination of the mind, which is acquire’d by custom, and causes us to make a transition from an object to its usual attendant, and from the impression of one to the lively idea of the other.”20 Even as we reach outside of ourselves to define our individuality, we cannot escape the intense loneliness that arrives when we realize that we can never truly think past our own set of perceptions and experiences. Hume concludes by arguing for the importance of conversation to break free from the mind’s isolation, a prescription that similarly appears as a source for social progress in the sentimental novel.

Hume’s philosophical interrogation of sympathy differs from that found in the sentimental novel in its dependence on discourse to fully overcome one’s dependence on the self. It sympathy requires communication to occur, what, then, is the source for the many instances of silence found in the novel’s sympathetic exchanges? The gap between two individuals’ experiences that can in turn lead to silence was investigated further by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). For Smith, sympathy is rooted in the imagination and represents the ability to enter into the feelings of another person, whether or not those feelings are those of sorrow or of happiness. Unlike Hume, Smith does not think that it is possible to completely enter into another person’s perceptions due to the difference between sympathy and passion: “Sympathy … does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that situation which excites it. We sometimes feel for another, a passion of which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality.”21 One person’s

20 Hume, p. 173.
imagination, sparked from what he or she observes in another, may experience emotions that the original person does not feel; this creates passion in the first, but this is not true sympathy.

Smith differentiates between pity and sympathy due to the presence of passion or emotion: “Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though is meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now … be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatsoever.” Sympathy is a higher level of understanding between two people because it is not merely an emotion but also a reaction to what another experiences; it creates balance and understanding between people. Though we should feel sympathy for other people, we should not turn to look to deeply at our own emotions, since we might be overcome with them instead of finding ways to help other people. Smith relies on experience rather than a moral duty toward another to prompt reform, suggesting that social justice is not an inherent feature of the sentimental novel, but dependent on actionable moments of compassion to be effective.

Both Hume and Smith were instrumental in establishing the importance of sympathy for a mutual communion of thoughts and feelings. The use of sympathy in the sentimental novel, however, often assumed a defined set of expectations and roles for conversation. John Beer, for example, argues “the fashion for cultivation of sensibility that had emerged could be thought of as a middle way, mediating between the competing rationalisms of writers such as Burke and Paine.” Readers could receive emotional gratification by experiencing sensations such as pity

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22 Smith, p. 15
23 The OED entry for “sympathy” charts how the word encompassed an expanding range of meanings from the seventeenth century to the present. In the eighteenth century, sympathy signified entering a state of “fellow-feeling” with another, and specifically “the quality or state of being thus affected by the suffering or sorrow of another” (“sympathy, n.” 3.b and 3.c, OED).
or compassion from a distance as spectators, but the increased use of sympathy in novels meant that readers turned to the sentimental novel for entertainment rather than moral edification. Sentimental plots typically pitted suffering female characters against male observers to their disadvantage, resulting in lopsided plots that did little to effect meaningful social change. The standard sentimental plot represents male characters silently listening to another’s story, but once their subjects have told their tale, they recede into the background while the male characters appropriate their history for their own benefit. The sympathetic conversation supposedly fosters equal relationships, but actually deepens the divide between characters when the narrator speaks their story for them.

Eighteenth-century literature incorporated Smith and Hume’s philosophical insights on sympathy, but the sentimental novel’s uneasy relationship between entertainment and moral feeling was further heightened by a publishing landscape that placed higher standards on women novelists and compared them to the model set by Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady (1748). Richardson’s heroine cannot reconcile her own desires with the actions society demands of her, and at the novel’s most crucial moments, Clarissa fails to actively resist the pressures that lead to her downfall.25 She rejects her father and siblings’ insistence that she marry the insufferable Mr. Solmes by voicing her displeasure and through her letters. Her parents refuse to listen to her pleas and her brother and sister destroy her letters before they can reach their intended audience. Clarissa’s family refuses to accept that she finds Solmes to be odious, and instead believes that she would rather marry Lovelace, who her brother, James Harlowe,

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25 Samuel Richardson, Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady, ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin, 1985). Subsequent references to Clarissa are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number.
views as a personal enemy. Clarissa’s silence stems from her unwillingness to say what her family expects of her and lets her family use her own unspoken desires against her, as Kathryn L. Steele argues: “Silence will be taken as evidence of affection for Lovelace… As her family pressures her, and as that pressure represents her father’s will, Clarissa is forced to say less about what she thinks and feels: her silence increases as she becomes increasingly disobedient.”

Clarissa’s silence does not passively reflect her sentimentality, but actually serves as her only weapon against the tyrannical actions of her family. When Lovelace tricks her into fleeing her parents’ house, her actions provide evidence that she has eloped with him, thus making her early protests moot.

Lovelace’s villainy is furthermore underscored when he exploits Clarissa’s resistance to his own ends. He exerts control over her correspondence, choosing when to deliver or censor her letters so that her family and friends never know the extent of her captivity. When Lovelace achieves his ultimate victory of her, he infamously recounts Clarissa’s rape in Letter 257 by saying that “I can go no farther. The affair is over” (p. 883). Clarissa, who to this point in the novel has been the chief letter-writer, uncharacteristically does not write of her ordeal. The letter that follows is from Lovelace’s friend, Belford, who criticizes Lovelace for his actions: “I am inexpressibly concerned at the fate of this matchless lady! She could not have fallen into the

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26 Kathryn L. Steele, “Clarissa’s Silence,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 23, 1 (Fall 2010): 1–34, 9. Focusing on Clarissa’s death as it relates to her religious inspiration, Steele argues, “by the time Clarissa starts to die, silences more deliberately thwart earthly and material communications and come to indicate Clarissa’s attempt at direct conversation with God” (p. 1). Clarissa’s silence becomes an embodiment of her chastity.

27 I read Clarissa’s willingness or refusal to write as representative of her use of silence. The connection between writing and speech/silence is complex, however, as evidenced by Jacques Rancière’s identification of two ways the concept of writing can be explained: “It can be orphaned speech lacking a body that might accompany it and attest to it, or, on the contrary, it can be a hieroglyph that bears its idea upon its body” (*Mute Speech*, trans. James Swenson [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2011], p. 36).
hands of any other man breathing, and suffered as she has done with thee” (p. 883). Belford elevates her to a virtuous, “matchless” position while simultaneously speaking for her. Although the novel’s plot centers on Clarissa’s suffering, Belford can reproach Lovelace for his actions when Clarissa cannot. By demonstrating that he has the capacity to enter into Clarissa’s subject position, Belford serves as the sentimental hero. Although the reader has been led to assume based on Lovelace’s early correspondence with him that he is his accomplice, Belford letter serves to reframe him as Lovelace’s foil.

In contrast, Clarissa’s voice is silenced after the rape. Lovelace includes ten papers that serve as Clarissa’s “mad letters” in Letter 261, but she never mails them and we are given to assume that she did not mean for them to be sent. In her “mad letters,” Clarissa writes drafts of letters, fables, and poetry to Anna Howe, her father, sister, and herself, lamenting her fate. But these first letters that are written are instead “Torn in two pieces” and “scratched through, and thrown under the table” (p. 890). Clarissa even writes to Anna: “What dreadful, dreadful things have I to tell you! But yet I cannot tell you neither” (p. 890). Her desire to tell the truth of her rape is undermined by her inability to speak. Clarissa does not write again to Anna until Letter 297, and her letter has a more subdued tone than her previous missives: “If I cannot suffer alone, I will make as few parties as I can in my sufferings” (p. 976). Clarissa seemingly wants to reject even the anticipation of sympathy, but of course the reader has been privy to her sufferings, as have Lovelace and Belford with the discovery of her letters. Her story is no longer her own, and thus she can be made to speak or be silent against her will. Clarissa recovers her agency by choosing to die understanding that her previous attempts to complain of her ill-treatment only led to additional suffering. Clarissa accepts silence and refuses to speak about her ordeal, allowing other characters to speak for her. Belford mediates the emotions that Clarissa’s plight stirs in
others within the novel, and Richardson as author provides the narrative framework for her suffering.

Richardson’s novel, then, is not only Clarissa’s story, but also her reader’s reactions to her letters. Richardson’s extensive correspondence with his readers led him to add over two hundred pages of additional material to the final novel, and Angus Ross notes that he often referred to Clarissa as “my girl” in his letters.\(^{28}\) The public’s enthusiasm for Clarissa produced numerous imitators, but the intensity of Richardson’s novel proved difficult to replicate without veering into caricature. It can be difficult to differentiate between the sentimental novel and satirical versions, since even overtly sincere novels such as Man of Feeling include self-deprecating moments (the introductory chapter to Mackenzie’s novel calls itself “excellent wadding”\(^ {29}\)). Later sentimental writers tried to capture Richardson’s intensity by crafting tales of increasingly desperate circumstances told to male protagonists. Laurence Sterne’s A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy (1768), for example, satirically relates the expectations of readers of sentimental fiction: “Maria let me wipe [her tears] away as they fell with my handkerchief.—I then steep’d it in my own—and then in hers—and then in mine—and then I wiped hers again—and as I did it, I felt such indescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combination of matter and motion.”\(^ {30}\) The focus of Parson Yorick’s emotion is not on the ostensible subject of his sorrow, Maria, but on his own self-reflective wonder at his own reaction. Though he wipes her tears away, he is as equally focused on his own sorrow, relying on Maria’s permission to dry her tears. The sentimental novel relies


on affective responses to imagined feelings that are inspired by watching others. As James Chandler notes in *Archaeology of Sympathy* (2013), “Sentiments, that is, tend to involve speculation as to the meaning of another’s countenance, what it expresses and what it hides. One might say that they elaborate a system of looking at lookers looking—even, or especially, when all this looking is taking place in the virtual space of the printed page.”\(^{31}\) The sentimental novel represents sympathy with two layers of mediation that constitute a “system”: a (typically) male protagonist viewing another’s misfortunes, as well as the reader who witnesses both the suffering and the other characters’ reaction to it.

Imitators of Richardson’s style seized on stories of human pain in order to bring out the “correct” reactions by their protagonists, but when women writers entered the field, they received discouraging reviews. The negative reception of novels written by women was due in part to Richardson’s unparalleled popularity, as Janet Todd explains: “Richardson’s domesticated romance became the feminine mode of writing, as no woman’s work could claim to be in these modest times.”\(^{32}\) In other words, Richardson’s prose was seen as more feminine (or sensitive, or delicate) than a female author could hope to achieve. A female writer’s virtue could be compromised by her narrative’s intent, so much so that many title pages bore the marker “By a Lady” instead of the author’s full name.\(^{33}\) Other female novelists of the sentimental novel

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\(^{33}\) See, for example, the first edition of Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), published by Thomas Egerton. Betty A. Schellenberg contests the assumption that “gender is the essential explanatory fact, that a female author’s achievement in the sphere of print letters, in its modes and its degree, is predicated upon the conditions governing her life as a woman,” but she concedes that market pressures and social expectations may have made it necessary for female writers to publish anonymously (*The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005], pp. 6 and 14).
found that their heroines’ sufferings were deemed to be too severe to their audiences. Frances Sheridan’s *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761) features a heroine who falls in love with the seemingly flawless Orlando Falkland. On the eve of their wedding, however, she discovers his previous affair with the now-pregnant Miss Burchell. Sidney renounces him and unhappily marries another man. Falkland continues to love Sidney, and is eventually jilted by Miss Burchell, who turns out to be a female rake. Sidney remains with her husband, citing her virtue as the reason for her fidelity. Sheridan dedicated her novel to an ailing Richardson, and while the novel was popular, reviewers criticized the plot for unnecessarily using female suffering to manipulate the reader’s emotion.

The sentimental novel had become such standard fare that the reviewer for the *Monthly Review* felt comfortable assigning a gender to its anonymous writer: “being assured that it is the work of a Lady, we shall only add that in our opinion, it is, upon the whole, greatly superior to most of the productions of her brother Novelists.” The reviewer assumes the author is a woman writing in the same vein as men, even as he presents a familial connection between “Novelists.”

The reviewer at first compliments Sheridan, but then continues to claim that the novel, in an effort to adhere to the dictates of conduct literature, goes too far in making its heroine suffer: “the Author seems to have no other design than to draw tears from the reader by distressing innocence and virtue, as much as possible … Such representations are by no means calculated to encourage and promote Virtue.” While entertaining, *Memoirs of Sidney Bidulph* was too sorrowful to contain the “virtues” of Richardson’s novel. That Sidney’s social embarrassment,

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Falkland’s indiscretion, and Miss Burchell’s out-of-wedlock pregnancy should be deemed more “distressing” than Clarissa’s rape and death testifies to the way that female writers were judged more negatively than their “brother Novelists.” The reviewer may have been struck by the amount of Sidney’s suffering because the novel, as being her “memoir,” represents it in her own terms, thus bringing the suffering more immediately to the reader’s attention. Unlike Clarissa, there is no male protagonist stand-in for the reader to redeem Sidney and Falkland’s suffering. Instead, the review suggests that the identity of the writer impacts the reader’s interpretation of the novel.

Women novelists such as Sheridan participated in literary society, but were criticized if their narratives subverted social expectations. Charlotte Lennox circumvented the marketplace’s double standard with the success of her novel, *The Female Quixote* (1752). Arabella, a lover of romance, artlessly and immoderately applies the lessons of her readings to her own situations, to great comedic effect. A typical example of the novel’s style of parody occurs toward the beginning: “Arabella blushed at the Sight of the Letter; and tho’, in Reality, she was not displeased, yet, being a strict Observer of romantic Forms, she chid her Woman severely for taking it. Carry it back, added she, to the presumptuous Writer of it; and let him know how greatly his Insolence has offended me.”

Arabella acts against her true feelings by refusing to acknowledge her suitor’s letter, but the scene represents a form of acceptable silence for heroines. Lennox’ sentimental anti-romance succeeds because of the humorous way Arabella exhibits female decorum, particularly in her extravagant language and actions, which Todd argues is “the kind of bombastic abstract language which was used in the (bad) translations of the

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French romances she reads.” Lennox permits Arabella to play the fool to emphasize her repentance by the novel’s conclusion. Like Sheridan, Lennox wrote to Richardson for advice on how to end her novel, and Richardson, no stranger to length, advised her, albeit in a cursory fashion, to keep *The Female Quixote* to two volumes rather than the three volumes she had first envisioned: “The method you propose, tho’ it might flatter my Vanity, yet will be thought a Contrivance between the Author of Arabella, and the Writer of Clarissa, to do Credit to the latter.” After struggling to revise her novel according to Richardson’s advice, Lennox expanded *The Female Quixote* to three volumes, but remained anxious about the appropriateness of Arabella’s “cure” from her romantic fantasies.

In the wake of *Clarissa*’s success and the growing popularity of the sentimental novel, some female novelists such as Sheridan attempted to work within the genre to limited success, while others such as Lennox laughed at the exaggerated language while maintaining the genre’s moral center. With the genre’s growing popularity also came the concern that the novel would corrupt female readers. Authors increasingly defended their stories with prefaces that not only clarified the author’s stylistic choices, but also demonstrated the fluidity and instability of genre itself. Clara Reeve’s introduction to *The Old English Baron* (1778) justifies her narrative choices while simultaneously protecting herself from criticism as a woman writer. She pointedly rejects critical disapproval of the romance genre as directed at the label and not the work itself: “altho’

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37 Todd, p. 155.
38 Richardson to Lennox, 13 January 1752, in Lennox, p. 424.
39 Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron*, ed. James Trainer (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003). The novel was originally published anonymously as *The Champion of Virtue* (1777) without the preface. As Andrea K. Henderson argues, the character’s introspection served as a representation of the author’s anxiety about the commercial market; the novels’ “interiorized Romantic identity, precisely because of its hiddenness, comes to be associated with the incomprehensibility and unpredictability of the market” (*Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774–1830* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996], p. 9).
some persons of wit and learning have condemned them indiscriminately, I would venture to affirm, that even those who so much affect to despise them under one form, will receive and embrace them under another.”

While Reeve connects her novel as descending from Richardson’s sentimental novel, she defends the “business of Romance” as “first, to excite the attention; and secondly, to direct it to some useful, or at least innocent, end” (p. 3). The Old English Baron has since been read as an early exemplar of the Gothic novel, but Reeve’s introduction serves as a defense for the romance genre more broadly, since she intends to blend the modern novel with the romance to maintain its basic probability.

By the last decade of the eighteenth century, the publishing marketplace had a dedicated female readership, but a critical print culture that fretted about the effect of sentimentalism on the weaker sex. Authors struggled to differentiate the novel from the romance, even as it became increasingly difficult to discern “bad” novels from morally “good” ones. Compounding the public’s concern about the status of virtuous stories is the fracturing of the novel into several subgenres including the gothic, historical, and domestic novels. The authors I include feature prominently in the Romantic canon and are often cited as originating new genres. As I will discuss in chapter one, Ann Radcliffe’s use of the “explained supernatural” modified the gothic novel to better appeal to rational audiences of the late eighteenth century, and Walter Scott’s development of the historical novel will be addressed in my discussion of the Waverley novels in chapter three.

Radcliffe, Scott, Burney, and Austen’s novels represent a subset of the diverse forms of British Romantic fiction that developed in the wake of the French Revolution. The impact of the French Revolution on literature at the turn of the nineteenth century cannot be

40 Reeve, p. 2.
41 For more on how Radcliffe’s version of the gothic novel differed from her predecessors, see E. J. Clery, The Rise of Supernatural Fiction 1762–1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995).
overstated, but for my purposes, it is important to note the backlash against female expression that makes itself evident in the novel’s re-investment in proper conduct. Even revolutionary artists are never made from whole cloth, however, and my dissertation endeavors to connect these separate genres into a lineage that can be mapped with silence. Radcliffe, Scott, Burney, and Austen create a non-alienating form of silence that met readers’ expectations for an affective emotional response to scenes of suffering, while also preserving silence as a form of resistance to male-dominated discourses of virtuous conduct.

My dissertation is structured in roughly chronological order to better show the development of the gothic, historical, and domestic novels as a process of revision and rewriting the sentimental novel. I begin my discussion with the gothic novel. My first chapter, “The Marks of Silence: Convents in Ann Radcliffe’s Romance of the Forest and The Italian,” argues that Radcliffe’s convents, a site of anxiety for many gothic novelists, hold a particular terror and fascination as communities that limit female speech. Neither marriage nor the convent provides sanctuary for Adeline and Ellena, and, unable to speak out against their suffering, they retreat into natural settings to restore their sense of individuality. Radcliffe’s novels privilege private, solitary communication within nature as an alternative to the hostile environment of the convent, as expressed through poetic interludes. Adeline and Ellena ultimately find comfort and shelter from threatening events through introspective asides rather than through a particular community.

My second chapter, “Walter Scott’s Crisis of Genre: Aphasia in Bride of Lammermoor,” develops the gothic’s critique of sympathy as a social phenomenon via the rise of the historical novel. Although Scott, rather obviously, is not a female novelist, he faced similar anxieties as the women writers in my dissertation. Scott turned to the novel as he continued his project to chronicle the oral traditions of the Scottish highlands but he remained anxious about the feminine
aspects of the novel. His initial project in the *Waverley* novels is to legitimate the novel form, as it did not have respect because it seemingly catered to women readers and writers. *The Bride of Lammermoor* borrows its themes, descriptions, and supernatural devices from gothic novels, and more than his other novels, relies on a predetermined conclusion foretold by oral legend. Scott questions whether silent suffering could be rendered visually to create a sympathetic response. The heroine, Lucy, cannot articulate her desires and as such becomes subsumed within the legend that organizes the novel’s plot. The ending dramatizes the loss of the individual against the need for society. Lucy and Ravenswood’s failure to separate truth from legend signals their inability to read across certain texts. The novel’s inconsistent use of epistolary evidence signals the shifting emphasis from the letter to the reader’s perceived interpretation. *Bride*, then, represents the sentimental novel’s failure to incorporate individual desires into those of the community.

Building off Scott’s development of the historical novel, my third chapter, “*The Wanderer* and Frances Burney’s Speaking Machines” examines the limitations of class-based sympathetic reactions vis-à-vis Burke’s chivalric sentimentalism. Ellis/Juliet’s identity is a secret from both the characters and the reader, in contrast to Elinor, the novel’s Female Philosopher who speaks excessively to avoid boredom. Though Elinor claims to espouse reason and truth, her frequent blushes and disappearances from the text suggests her vulnerability to outside critique. Unlike male characters that display a chivalric, sexualized sympathy toward Ellis/Juliet, female characters misinterpret her silence; yet Ellis/Juliet must rely on the charitable actions of female characters that ultimately prove to be driven by their own self-interest. The novel displays a breakdown of sympathy across both upper and lower class society. The reactions of other characters demonstrate the prejudice that accompanies sympathetic responses. Burney ultimately
relieves Ellis/Juliet’s failure to assimilate by revealing that she is Lord Granville’s daughter. The novel’s conclusion, detailing the failure of her marriage ceremony, acts as a culmination of her inability to have agency as an individual, and demonstrates the individual’s reliance on communities.

My fourth chapter, “Revising Sympathetic Silence in Jane Austen’s Domestic Fiction,” concludes my dissertation by examining the impact of Austen’s development of free indirect discourse on the novel’s ability to represent female interiority. Beginning with an investigation of conduct books that advocated reticence or silence, especially for women, as an appropriate way to respond, I then examine the failure of communication that occurs when male and female characters perform prescribed sympathetic reactions in their conversations that are less tied to genuine emotional responses than they are reiterations of predesigned sentiments. Austen’s novels suggest that pure, objective responses to speech or observations do not exist, but are always filtered through the lens of personal experience, which she conveys through close third person prose rather than dialogue. This technical achievement permits the reader to see through the artificiality of society’s mannerisms and conversation. Silence can thus become a more sincere method of speech even if other characters cannot understand or interpret thoughts that remain hidden or secret.

My dissertation concludes by recuperating silent response as a corrective to prescriptive models of communication that limit individualism. Solely focusing on the domestic novel limits our understanding of how the novel develops in the second half of the eighteenth century. By challenging the novel’s reliance on conversation, my dissertation complicates current interpretations of female anxieties about speech as well as the publishing marketplace. My reading of these novels as stemming from the sentimental novel extends and revises Jillian
Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman’s identification of Romantic novels as a “field,” not a “taxonomy,” and answers their call to consider “Romantic-era … revolutions in generic form not only as philosophical or aesthetic explorations, but also as a medium for re-thinking human action and human community.” \(^\text{42}\) Romantic novelists depict the individual’s alienation from society as a class-based, racial, and gendered prejudice that is constituted through speech. Silence becomes a stylistic technique in the Romantic novel that becomes part of the foundation upon which our understanding of genre is built. My dissertation is structured around four authors, Radcliffe, Scott, Burney, and Austen, each of whom become inextricably linked in readers’ and critics’ minds as best exemplifying the gothic, historical, and domestic novels respectively. These genres allow us to see how silence operates as conversational absence, aphasia, and reticence within the texts. Moreover, silence can represent a metaphorical description of the limitations of the eighteenth-century publishing marketplace that further encouraged Romantic-period authors to adapt the sentimental novel to create new discursive opportunities. When read as a group, these four novelists show the variety of means by which the Romantic novel recuperates silence as a positive form of female self-expression.

CHAPTER ONE

The Marks of Silence: Convents in Ann Radcliffe’s *Romance of the Forest* and *The Italian*

Ann Radcliffe was already an established gothic novelist by the time she published her travelogue of her first and only trip to the continent, *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794, through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany* in 1795. Her first four novels, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), extensively use landscape imagery and atmospheric realism to convey the emotional and psychological impact of terror on her characters. She wrote one other major work after her trip, *The Italian* (1797), and her last novel, *Gaston de Blondeville* (written 1802), was published posthumously in 1826. *A Journey* holds a unique place in Radcliffe’s oeuvre as her only long-form nonfiction work, providing a counterpoint to her commercially successful phantasmagorical novels.

*A Journey* resembles the path taken by Radcliffe’s heroines as they consider the value of communities, which they ultimately abandon in favor of solitude in nature. The timing of the publication of *A Journey* is significant not only for its placement in regards to her fiction but also for the observations she makes during an historically turbulent moment on the Continent. Radcliffe and her husband, William, traveled the summer of 1794, the same year and time as Robespierre’s fall (July [Thermidor] 1794) and the end of the Reign of Terror in France. With a

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novelist’s eye, Radcliffe describes fields torn apart by battle and whole cities that have been reduced to poverty. Though her descriptions of ravaged landscapes and generous countrymen are every bit as rich as those found in her fiction, Radcliffe carefully distances herself from her writing, particularly the political passages. Indeed, she goes so far as to claim that she is merely William’s scribe and defers to her husband’s judgment, stating of herself in the introduction that “where the economical and political conditions of countries are touched upon in the following work, the remarks are less her own than elsewhere.”44 By distancing herself from her narrative, Radcliffe differentiates her travelogue from her novels by situating herself as an anthropologist, describing the people, customs, and landscapes she sees without involving herself too deeply in public discussion of politics or economics, a topic she reserves for William. In this way, A Journey differs from other accounts of the French Revolution such as Helen Maria Williams’s Letters Written in France (1794) that openly admitted to be the opinions of the author.45 Williams actively states her thoughts and opinions of the political turmoil by framing her travelogue as letters to a friend, while Radcliffe subsumes herself under the guise of writing from her husband’s point of view, even though she published the travelogue under her own name, likely to take advantage of her literary success. By doing so, however, Radcliffe foregrounds her involvement and places her assumed modesty under question.46

44 Radcliffe, A Journey, p. v.
45 Helen Maria Williams, Letters Written in France Vol. 1, in Women’s Travel Writing: 1750–1850, ed. Caroline Franklin (London: Routledge, 2006). Williams writes in a similar vein of the order of the Carmelites: “When we entered the convent, it seemed the residence of silence and solitude: no voice was heard, no human creature appeared … when any of their friends visited them, if they spoke, they were not suffered to be seen, or if they were seen, they were not suffered to speak” (67). Though Williams and Radcliffe shared a negative view of Catholic orders, Williams writes with plain language that favors description over feelings and notably differs from Radcliffe’s emotive expressions.
46 Radcliffe’s reluctance to ascribe political observations to herself resembles the social propriety that her heroines maintain. Radcliffe’s heroines display a polite sense of decorum in the midst of
Upon reading the ensuing travelogue, it is less clear where her voice ends and her husband’s begins. As the couple travels from town to town, she alternatively describes some as picturesque villages and others as ruined vestiges of the past. Radcliffe gestures toward an imagined historical moment that produces a sense of nostalgia for places that are irrevocably changed due to the Revolution. Her accounts can be read as a conservative response to the social and political upheavals she witnesses. Radcliffe couples physical descriptions with narratives of people she meets. At one point, an encounter with a counter-Revolutionary French Lieutenant-Colonel prompts her to comment on how the Revolution had divided families: “the rising generation were all *enragées* in favour of the Revolution, of which the following was a remarkable instance: Two young ladies, the daughters of a baron, who had remained passively in the country, without promoting, or resisting the Revolution, were then engaged in a law-suit with their father, by which they demanded a maintenance, separate from him, ‘he being either an Aristocrat, or a Neutralist, with whom they did not choose to reside.’” Despite Radcliffe’s seemingly impartial account, her language insists that France’s political climate negatively influenced the private decisions of individuals. While she provides a sympathetic view to the countrymen, Radcliffe expresses criticism for religious institutions. Her purportedly objective description of a convent contains thinly veiled censures of the conditions of monastic life. It is worth quoting this passage at length to understand the completeness of Radcliffe’s disapproval:

plots that frequently involved threats to female sexuality in the form of rape, abduction and torture. Yael Shapira notes that in Radcliffe’s gothic novels, the heroine at frequent intervals stops to assess her social behavior, often in the midst of running from danger. Shapira reads this as a way for female authors of the gothic to preserve their own social dignity in the midst of criticism against female writers (“Where the Bodies Are Hidden: Ann Radcliffe’s ‘Delicate’ Gothic” *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 18, 4 [2006]: 453–76).  

While the strains of revelry arose from an adjoining garden, into which our windows opened, a pause in the music allowed us to catch some notes of the vespers service, performing in a convent of the order of Clarisse, only three or four doors beyond. Of the severe rules of this society we had been told in the morning. The members take a vow, not only to renounce the world, but their dearest friends, and are never after permitted to see even their fathers or mothers, though they may sometimes converse with the latter from behind a curtain. And, lest some lingering remains of filial affection should tempt an unhappy nun to lift the veil of separation between herself and her mother, she is not allowed to speak even with her, but in the presence of an abbess. Accounts of such horrible perversions of human reason make the blood thrill and the teeth chatter. Their fathers they can never speak to, for no man is suffered to be in any part of the convent used by the sisterhood, nor, indeed, is admitted beyond the gate, except when there is a necessity for repairs, when all the votaries of the order are previously secluded. It is not easily that a cautious mind becomes convinced of the existence of such severe orders, when it does, astonishment at the artificial miseries, which the ingenuity of human beings forms for themselves by seclusion, is as boundless as at the other miseries, with which the most trivial vanity and envy so frequently pollute the intercourses of social life.\textsuperscript{48}

Radcliffe sprinkles her impassioned opinions with novelistic flourishes: “Accounts of such horrible perversions of human reason make the blood thrill and the teeth chatter.” The passage begins with “strains of revelry,” that draw their attention, but Radcliffe recoils when she learns that the women are separated from their parents and eventually lose their freedom to speak when they take the veil. Radcliffe forgoes the spiritual gain of the Catholic order in favor of highlighting the tragedies within the convent’s walls by reminding readers that young women who become nuns had families of their own. Most distressing to Radcliffe are the gendered differences between the parents; the nun may never see her father again, but she may see her mother, albeit infrequently and through a veil. Men are allowed beyond the walls when the convent needs repairs, but only during vesper services.

Radcliffe’s description emphasizes the psychological implications of living in an all female community and foreshadows the dangers of convent life found in *Romance of the Forest* and *The Italian*. Adeline and Ellena, the respective heroines of these novels, share characteristics found in many gothic novels, but their common antipathy to convent life makes them useful case studies. Both characters initially resist entering convents, but later change their minds. For Adeline and Ellena, the convent becomes a permeable space wherein one’s individual identity is not distinct from the institution itself. The convent operates as a shelter when inhabited for a temporary period of time and a prison when considered as a long-term asylum, and their acceptance or rejection of convent life is highly dependent on the effect their choice would have on their ability to speak. Though Radcliffe’s nuns draw on these arguments in favor of convent

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life, her novels express ambivalence toward religious institutions. Both Adeline and Ellena consider temporary retreats when their life is in danger, but resist long-term residencies. Their arguments against the convent suggest that if they become nuns, they will no longer be able to speak freely. The convent, as an institution, exerts its influence by controlling the language of its inhabitants.

Though Radcliffe claims that she was only informed of the “severe rules of this society” the morning before her visit, other eighteenth-century accounts of convent life suggest that her impressions of Clarisse coincide with British prejudice against Roman Catholics.\textsuperscript{50} Enlightenment thinkers in Britain and France sharply criticized the Catholic Church as a superstitious institution that corrupts individualism. Gothic novels often stage monasteries and convents as oppressive settings that David Punter notes are “social but silent, the home not of bluff and desperate honesty but of midnight intrigue.”\textsuperscript{51} Monasteries and convents figure prominently in Gothic novels as institutions that silence individuals, as dangerous places that strip away female identity, leaving characters vulnerable and without a voice. Novels by Denis Diderot, the Marquis de Sade, and Matthew Lewis imagine convents as locations for debauchery. In \textit{La Religieuse (The Nun, 1796)}, Diderot’s heroine, Suzanne, is forced to enter a convent when her parents abandon her after spending their money on her sisters’ dowries.\textsuperscript{52} After her sexual awakening in the arms of the Mother Superior, Suzanne experiences cruelty and oppression at the hands of her captors. \textit{The Nun} includes graphic depictions of Suzanne’s treatment meant to

\textsuperscript{50} Linda Colley traces the eighteenth century’s anti-Catholic sentiment in Britain from 1688 onward when James II was forced to flee to France. The Act of Settlement in 1701 prohibited anyone who was Catholic or married to a Catholic to sit on the throne, eventually leading to the Hanoverian succession in 1714 (\textit{Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837} [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2009], pp. 46–7).
titillate readers while also informing them of the social injustices of convent life. Similarly, the Marquis de Sade’s *Justine, ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu* (1791) describes the heroine entering a monastery for security only to become the victim of lascivious monks.\(^{53}\) Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) features fallen nuns and ambitious prioresses, and explodes with sexual possibilities. Its hyper-sexuality became a model for horror-driven gothic novels that recklessly flaunted their salaciousness.\(^{54}\)

Despite the resistance to Catholicism in eighteenth-century Britain, however, criticism of convent life in gothic novels did not necessarily stem solely from the authors’ religious objections or willingness to exploit it for tales of sexual transgressions. Radcliffe’s novels share with Diderot and Lewis an aversion to monastic life, but differ from them in that she highlights the domestic terrors of entering a convent. Radcliffe notes that “artificial miseries” can proliferate even as the convent provides an escape from the “most trivial vanity and envy” that “so frequently pollute the intercourses of social life.”\(^{55}\) For Radcliffe, the convent is not simply a location for debauchery and mysticism; it is a real place where daughters are torn from their mothers and can no longer communicate with their fathers, and where they lose their connection to society. Her description of monastic life examines how the young nuns’ vow of silence impacts their interactions with their family, but not how their silence impacts their connection

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\(^{54}\) Matthew Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance*, ed. Christopher MacLachlan (New York: Penguin, 1998). Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya; or, The Moor* (1806) strongly echoes Lewis’ *The Monk* but changes the gender roles and the religion and race of the Satanic figure. Whereas Matilda disguises herself as a monk in order to gain Ambrosio’s trust, Zofloya, a moor, portrays himself as the servant of the man Victoria de Loredani desires before revealing himself as Satan. *Zofloya* raises the issue of a woman’s control over her sexuality while transgressing cultural taboos of religion and race.

with God. Her omission of silence’s function in the religious order may be due to the frequency of silence used as a metaphor in eighteenth-century religious revivals. Religious silence gained prominence as the century progressed with the growing popularity of new Protestant denominations including Methodism and Quakerism. Quakers believed that non-linguistic communication with God was the correct path to spiritual enlightenment. Quaker ideas were disseminated through popular books such as Mary Brooks’s *Reasons for the Necessity of Silent Waiting in order to the Solemn Worship of God* (1774) which argued not only for the value of silent worship to be closer to God but also for the virtue of silence within one’s life.\(^{56}\) The Catholic Church, as framed by gothic novels, derives its power by acting as a mediator between God and the individual to the detriment of society.

Radcliffe’s *Romance of the Forest* and *The Italian* share other gothic novels’ disapproval of convents in their attention to the silencing of female voices. Radcliffe dissociates the convent’s use of silence from religious devotion, unlike some eighteenth century Protestant denominations, using it as an opportunity to show the degenerate nature of convent life. Her treatment of convents couples British prejudice with a social commentary that shows how religious isolation can lead to repressive practices. Religious figures have the least interaction with nature, further making it necessary for the heroines to seek a connection with a higher power on their own through private encounters with the sublime.\(^{57}\) *Romance of the Forest* and *The Italian* demonstrate how silence can serve as a connection between the heroine and introspective moments with nature, as well as a symptom of social isolation. Adeline and Ellena

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\(^{57}\) Kim Ian Michasiw writes that the Gothic is terrible not merely because the heroines are persecuted by unknown dangers, but rather “the real danger is the power of the corrupt abbess, a power divorced utterly from the landscape” (“Ann Radcliffe and the Terrors of Power,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 6, 4 [July 1994]: 327–46, 338).
maintain their interiority through recourse to private retreats to nature that provide a restorative alternative to the repressive atmosphere of the convent.

A COMMUNITY FOR WOMEN

_The Romance of the Forest_ begins as the La Motte family, on the run from creditors in Paris, frees Adeline from a group of robbers and hides with her in an abandoned abbey. When questioned about her origins, Adeline explains that her father placed her in a convent after her mother’s death. Initially the convent served as a proxy for her absent mother because it provided her with the social and moral education she would not have received otherwise, but after she comes of age, the convent’s benevolent aspects fall away to reveal a repressive structure that echoes society’s demands of women. The Mother Superior gives her the choice to either become a nun or marry an unsuitable husband, and tries to persuade Adeline to join the convent by espousing “the serenity of a monastic life—its security from the seductive charms, restless passions, and sorrowful vicissitudes of the world—the rapturous delights of religion, and sweet reciprocal affection of sisterhood” (_RF_, p. 37). The Mother Superior’s arguments in favor of the convent recall earlier eighteenth-century representations of all-female communities, such as Mary Astell’s _A Serious Proposal to the Ladies_ (1694), that represent the convent as a “utopian space.”

58See also Brenda Tooley, who argues “Safe as it is from the machinery of persecution,” descriptions of the convent call to mind “a textual tradition of proposals for and sketches of utopian women’s community” (“Gothic Utopia: Heretical Sanctuary in Ann Radcliffe’s _The Italian_,” in _Gender and Utopia in the Eighteenth Century: Essays in English and French Utopian Writing_, ed. Nicole Pohl and Tooley [Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2007], pp. 53–68, 53).
Astell envisions an exclusively female retirement that would provide educational opportunities for women and provide an asylum from an outwardly hostile world. She writes, “Now as to the Proposal it is to erect a Monastery, … being not only a Retreat from the World for those who desire that advantage, but likewise, an institution and previous discipline, to fit us to do the greatest good in it.”

Astell’s proposal highlights the necessity for women to obtain a space solely for them in order to do “the greatest good.” Notably, she recommends not only a physical “retreat,” but also an “institution,” an important distinction that highlights the social aspects of her proposal, even in its seclusion from the world, rather than the physical location. This recommendation is taken up by later novels including Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall* (1762) that equate female retreats to a utopian community where women can speak freely. The convent, where Adeline can find the “sweet reciprocal affection of sisterhood,” protects women against the world’s “seductive charms” and “restless passions,” and, according to George G. Dekker, echoes Radcliffe’s descriptions of a utopian village later in the novel: “That the sisterhood is only a surrogate ‘large family’ makes it no less attractive.”

Dekker reads the Mother Superior’s arguments as evidence that Radcliffe was sympathetic to the Catholic community, but Adeline’s forceful rejection of this proposition suggests a rebellion not only against monastic life but also the domestic unhappiness that would accompany an arranged marriage. The Mother Superior’s positive description of the convent speaks to an underlying anxiety about women’s social position. By giving Adeline a choice to marry or become a nun, the Abbess articulates the lack of viable options for eighteenth-century women.

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Adeline’s convent resembles a prison-like site that would deny both social interaction and the solitude of nature: “It was in the convent only that people were deceitful and cruel: it was there only that misery dwelt” (RF, p. 37). She rejects the abbess’s emphasis of the convent’s positive aspects by outlining the oppression and rigidity that the monastic life entails: to be “excluded from the cheerful intercourse of society—from the pleasant view of nature—almost from the light of day—condemned to silence,” encompasses the “horrors of the monastic life” (RF, pp. 36–7). In contrast to the Mother Superior’s pleasant depiction, Adeline recoils from the convent’s restrictions on social interaction and measures the “horrors” in terms of female speech—convents “condemn” women to silence and deny them “cheerful intercourse.” Adeline contradicts the idealistic view given by the abbess by arguing that admission comes with a price: the loss of language.

When La Motte and the Marquis begin to pursue her, however, she changes her mind and proposes that she should go to a convent despite the protestations of her lover Theodore: “‘I am thinking how I may avoid a situation so deplorable … They say there is a convent, which receives boarders, within a few miles, and thither I wish to go’” (RF, p. 192). Under threat and without options, Adeline decides the convent would be the best place to hide after all: “much as her experience had prejudiced her against the manners of a convent, she saw no place more likely to afford her a proper asylum” (RF, p. 236). Her initial reluctance to enter the monastery stems from her fear that she will lose her ability to speak, but the threat of violence outside the convent is more dangerous. As she rationalizes her change of heart, she notes the difference between the inhabitants of the convent and the structure itself. As long as the convent provides shelter from those who pursue her, Adeline feels that it is a safe place to retire, but once the outside threat is removed, she prefers the unbounded freedoms of nature instead. Robert Miles
articulates this crucial distinction between sanctuary and permanent residence and identifies not only the restorative value of the convent, but also the conditions under which this difference takes place:

The true risks posed by Radcliffe’s plots are not the rapes threatened with a surprising frequency in such a proper writer, but the alienation of property and place, for these are the enabling conditions of female creativity, and therefore genius. The convent thus has a double valence in Radcliffe: as a place of refuge it sustains the heroine’s genius (so long as the fate of her property still hangs in the balance); as a final destination (with property lost), it is the cemetery of the living, a patriarchal Bastille where females are shorn of their expressive properties.  

Miles locates the different ways of viewing the convent in relation to the temporary nature of the asylum; so long as Adeline can leave at some point, she is not permanently silenced. Permanent residence takes away her legal status and right to speak in much the same way that marriage would.

Like Adeline, Ellena in *The Italian* finds herself without shelter after her caretaker dies under mysterious circumstances, but whereas Adeline knows details regarding her past, Ellena loses her personal history with Signora Bianchi’s untimely death. Although Signora Bianchi tries to communicate to Ellena, “‘She could not speak … but she was sensible, for she would look so at Signora Ellena, and then try again to speak; it almost broke one’s heart to see her. Something

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seemed to lie upon her mind, and she tried almost to the last to tell it” (I, pp. 53–4). The poison used to kill her robs her of her voice, but her silence foreshadows Ellena’s later difficulties. Without a guardian or mother, Ellena lacks a legal claim to their villa and decides to stay in a nearby convent to safeguard her unstable social position: “her affliction required little persuasion on this subject. It was her wish to retire hither, as to a sanctuary, which was not only suitable to her particular circumstances, but also especially adapted to the present state of her spirits. Here she believed that she should sooner acquire resignation, and regain tranquility, than in a place less consecrated to religion; and, before she took leave of the Abbess, it was agreed, that she should be received as a boarder” (I, pp. 68–9). Ellena chooses to “be received as a boarder,” and not a permanent resident because she believes the convent will help her grieve Signora Bianchi’s death. Once she resides in the convent, however, the Abbess, under the direction of the villainous Marchesa, insists that she enter the order as a nun. Ellena resists, and the Abbess demands, “‘if you reject the veil, you must accept the husband who is offered you’” (I, p. 99). Ellena, aware of that either choice will rob her of her independence, refuses to obey: “‘my resolution is already taken, and I reject each of the offered alternatives. I will neither condemn myself to a cloister, or to the degradation with which I am threatened on the other hand. Having said this, I am prepared to meet whatever suffering you shall inflict upon me; but be assured, that my own voice never shall sanction the evils to which I may be subjected, and that the immortal love of justice, which fills all my heart, will sustain my courage no less powerfully than the sense of what is due to my own character’” (I, p. 99). Elena refuses to “condemn” herself to a cloister, preferring instead to honor her “own character” by placing her desires first. Ellena compares herself to a falsely accused prisoner and feels that the nuns persecute her even though she has done nothing wrong.
Ellena positions the convent against secular institutions as a “sanctuary,” a place that would provide a safe-haven from a dangerous patriarchal world, but rejects the Abbess’s insistence that she become a nun because entering the Order would cost her the freedom to control her own voice. My reading of Ellena’s assertive refusal of the convent differs from Diane Long Hoeveler, who argues that her primary means of communication is reticence: “the abbess is able to exert real power over the very life of Ellena … In such a doubly negative situation, Ellena’s only recourse is one of passive-aggression: she is silent.” On the contrary, Ellena forcefully vocalizes her resistance, but later uses silence as a means to ensure her safety outside the convent. Ellena’s reliance on her sense of “character” sustains her courage, and allows her to choose when and how she speaks. Adeline and Ellena refuse the convent in favor of the peace they gain through retreats to natural spaces since they provide a place in which to enjoy solitude or commune with others without the oppressive oversight of society or the convent. Their decisions put their reputation at risk and endanger their safety, but prove to be the best measure to overcome adversity. As we shall see, Adeline in Romance of the Forest evades her pursuers not by submitting to a convent but by relying on her intuition. Adeline’s actions declare her intention to maintain control of her voice, so that when instances of silence occur, they represent a conscious and sincere assertion of Adeline’s individuality.

SILENCE AND THE SUBLIME IN ROMANCE OF THE FOREST

Descriptions of landscapes in Radcliffe’s novels often reflect the heroines’ awareness of the strange power that nature holds over their sensibilities. In Romance of the Forest, La Motte

and his family, accompanied by Adeline, discover a mysterious abbey that holds a strange sort of power over the forest. The effects of time and history have worn it into decay as ivy grows up the sides and birds make their nests in the ruins:

the Gothic remains of an abbey … stood on a kind of rude lawn, overshadowed by high and spreading trees, which seemed coeval with the building and diffused a romantic gloom around. The greater part of the pile appeared to be sinking into ruins, and that, which had withstood the ravages of time, shewed the remaining features of the fabric more awful in decay. The lofty battlements, thickly entwined with ivy, were half demolished, and become the residence of birds of prey. Huge fragments of the eastern tower, which was almost demolished, lay scattered amid the high grass, that waved slowly to the breeze. (RF, p. 15)

Radcliffe draws a scene that is at once terrifying in scale ("lofty battlements, "huge fragments of the eastern tower") and eerily peaceful. As La Motte moves further into the abbey, drawn by a force he cannot explain, he finds the chapel, "where the hymn of devotion had once been raised, and the tear of penitence had once been shed; sounds which could not only be recalled by imagination—tears of penitence, which had long since been fixed in fate" (RF, p. 15). Since the abbey has been abandoned to its fate, only the building bears the marks of the clergy who used to live within it.63 La Motte’s imagination recalls the sounds of the religious services as if the abbey’s former inhabitants still haunt it. Adeline similarly experiences the abbey as a place of

63 The abbey presumably has been destroyed as a result of religious conflict. See Anne Janowitz’s a commentary on nationalism and the ruined abbey as a trope that becomes central in Romantic literature (England’s Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape [Oxford: Blackwell, 1990]).
reflection. Compared to the restrictions she faced in the convent, Adeline does not feel constrained or repressed in the abbey, which becomes transmediated into a Romantic location where Adeline’s poetic effusions are safe from censorship. After her first night, she wakes before dawn and is overcome with emotion: “her tears flowed silently and fast. That she might indulge them without restraint, she went to a window that looked upon an open part of the forest; all was gloom and silence; she stood for some time viewing the shadowy scene” (RF, p. 22). She cries before she sees the “gloom and silence,” and indulges her imagination by projecting her depressed emotions onto what she sees. But nature responds to her mind’s distress with a pleasing morning view: “The low and gentle responses of birds, awakened by the morning ray, now broke the silence of the hour; the soft warbling rising by degrees till they swelled the chorus of universal gladness” (RF, p. 22). Adeline echoes the sentiments of the birds, and gives a prayer of thanks to God: “she wiped the tears from her eyes, while the sweet union of conscience and reflection rewarded her trust; and her mind, losing the feelings which had lately oppressed it, became tranquil and composed” (RF, p. 22). As she remembers her past, she appreciates the calm that nature brings, but does not force her will upon the landscape. She feels safe within this spot, but only because it arose from her pleasing intercourse with nature.

The abbey seems terrifying at first, as Radcliffe draws the reader’s attention to its “awful decay.” Matthew Wickman explains how Gothic novels frightened readers either through scenes of terror or horror: “In the case of terror, a turbid moodiness lingers as a reminder of what the conventions of narrative cannot convey, whereas with horror these conventions swell into monstrosities that overwhelm the objects which they describe.”64 Whereas horror relies on “monstrosities” that “overwhelm the objects which they describe,” terror relies on extrasensory

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perceptions to convey things that defy easy explanation or categorization. Adeline’s perceptions of the scenery awes and inspires her, but she maintains her agency throughout her retreat into the forest. Physical locations and events are not static, but instead subject to Adeline’s quiet contemplation that creates a sense of peace within the scene. Her interaction with the sublime produces a restorative silence that differs from the convent’s enforced reticence.

Adeline’s positive, though quiet, reflections on nature represent a shift from the silence of the convent. Since Radcliffe had not travelled to the locations in Romance of the Forest before she wrote the novel, her descriptions of the landscape’s emotional power relied heavily on Edmund Burke’s 1757 treatise, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas into the Sublime and the Beautiful. Burke claims that obscurity is a necessary component of the sublime: “To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds.”65 Adeline’s descriptions of the forest notably lack distinguishing physical features, thus allowing her to move within it unencumbered by geography. Nature creates a meditative space that permits moments of narrative silence that enable Adeline’s mind to wander freely, sometimes to the terror that awaits her outside the forest, while at others to her inner turmoil. Frances Ferguson argues that the Burkean sublime operates as a “commitment to self and self-preservation”: “we react with dread and awe to what is sublime because of its

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appearing greater than we are, for being *more*, and making us acknowledge its power." While Ferguson notes that solitude emerges from the sublime as an individual retreats into his- or herself, Adeline’s creative imaginings suggest that Radcliffe intentionally reverses the order of sublime experience so that Adeline’s sense of isolation occurs first, which she then incorporates into poetry that makes use of sublime imagery. Silence, or the failure of language, does not happen in response to encounters with the landscape, but becomes an opportunity to externalize her internal struggles onto an imagined scene of natural violence.

Adeline’s retreats to nature reflect Radcliffe’s readings of Burke. Burke’s analysis of the sublime owes much to Joseph Addison’s series of essays on the “Pleasures of the Imagination,” published in the *Spectator* nos. 411 through 421 (June 21 through July 3, 1712). Adeline’s meditations operate as a record of her intellectual engagement with sensory experience as well as allow her mind to expand beyond her immediate surroundings. In no. 420, Addison writes, “Nothing is more pleasant to the fancy, than to enlarge itself, by degrees, in its contemplation of the various proportions which its several objects bear to each other, when it compares the body of man to the bulk of the whole earth, the earth to the circle it describes round the sun, that circle to the sphere of the fixed stars, the sphere of the fixed stars to the circuit of the whole creation, the whole creation itself to the infinite space that is everywhere diffused about it.”

By letting the mind “enlarge itself” to think about proportions, man realizes his small scale in relation to the earth, and by extension, his concept of the universe. As Addison moves outward in scale from man to earth, to sun, to stars, and finally the whole “circuit,” he positions them much like a matryoshka doll, each fitting in and interacting with the one just larger. The failure of the

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imagination is actually a failure of language as evidenced when Addison finds himself at a loss to explain why the mind’s imagination falters when attempting to comprehend an object that is either too big or too small in comparison to man.

Adeline endeavors to overcome the sublime’s impulse toward silence by composing poetry that helps to relieve her of her anxiety about her own welfare. She leaves the abbey “to enjoy the sweet evening hour, but strayed no farther than an avenue near the abbey … The air was still, the sun, sinking below a distant hill, spread a purple glow over the landscape, and touched the forest glades with softer light. A dewy freshness was diffused upon the air. As the sun descended, the dusk came silently on, and the scene assumed a solemn grandeur” (RF, p. 83). This serene introduction leads into an inserted poem titled “Night” that addresses the restorative power of creativity:

[...]

Queen of the solemn thought—mysterious Night!
Whose step is darkness, and whose voice is fear!
Thy shades I welcome with severe delight,
And hail thy hollow gales, that sigh so drear!
[...]

Thy milder terror, Night, I frequent woo,
Thy silent lightnings, and thy meteor’s glare,
Thy northern fires, bright with ensanguine hue,
That light in heaven’s high vault the fervid air.
[...]
And nameless objects in the vale below,
That floating dimly to the musing eye,
Assume, at Fancy’s touch, fantastic shew,
And raise her sweet romantic visions high.

[...]

What melancholy charm steals o’er the mind!
What hallow’d tears the rising rapture greet!
While many a viewless spirit in the wind,
Sighs to the lonely hour in accents sweet!

Ah! who the dear illusion pleas’d would yield,
Which Fancy wakes from silence and from shades,
For all the sober forms of Truth reveal’d
For all the scenes that Day’s bright eye pervades!

The inclusion of “Night” heightens the novel’s somber mood by inserting images of terror when it is not necessarily present in Adeline’s surroundings. The unknowable nature of the objects below testifies to power of “Fancy” and creativity. Night, figured here as the “Queen of the solemn thought,” is feminized but given powerful strength as it leads the imagination to various unruly visions. The mind is overcome by “melancholy charms,” suggesting a sense of mourning, and yet the speaker regrets the coming of the “Day’s bright eyes,” that reveal “the sober forms of Truth.” The poem lingers on the speaker’s interiority, for these images can only be conjured by a “musing eye,” or a thoughtful mind in repose. The poem concludes at daybreak when “Fancy
wakes from silence and from shades,” which suggests that while meditation on sublime objects is pleasing to the imagination, the resulting silence is ephemeral and disappears upon sunrise. “Night” represents the terror mixed with pleasure that Adeline feels. The “nameless objects” float “dimly to the amusing eye” and transform at “Fancy’s touch,” but strange silences disturb any possibility for harmony. Burke writes that “A sudden beginning, or sudden cessation of sound of any considerable force” can cause terror, and in “Night,” sudden cessations of sound underscore an unexpected fragility in the poem. The unexpected bolt of lightning in the poem creates a terrible image, because it would briefly illuminate the figures that are cloaked in obscurity by Night. The speaker, however, takes care to call these “silent lightnings,” and their appearance occurs in a stanza devoted to “milder Night,” assuming a version of Night that is pleasing more than terrifying. Radcliffe’s use of inset poems suggests that her characters’ feelings are best expressed through elevated language that adheres to Burke’s theory of the sublime, but the passage’s originality lies in its reversal of the sublime’s causality, making the sublime an intellectual experience as much as an emotional one.

The overwhelming sensations caused by being in the presence of sublime scenes causes Adeline to feel alone even when her would-be suitors intrude into her meditations. When Louis LaMotte, the young son of her protector, interrupts an introspective moment to express his feelings toward her, Adeline responds without speaking: “She did not appear to notice his last words, but remained silent.” Since she is a single woman without a guardian, any response she gives Louis could be interpreted as reciprocating his affections. Louis takes the hint and “said no more, but seemed sunk in thought; and this silence remained uninterrupted, till they entered the abbey” (RF, p. 85). Their mutual silence takes on a different tenor than the meditative silence.

68 Burke, p. 76.
Adeline enjoyed alone because it reflects unrequited love and troubled friendship while disrupting the peace Adeline finds in the abbey. Not all speech must be answered; silence can serve both as a relaxation of social conversation, and as an inhibition to fully expressing yourself to another. Nancy Yousef persuasively identifies an “opposed-yet-complementary set of interpretive possibilities” that highlight the tension between sympathetic interaction and solitude: “silence as a reprieve from reciprocity, a vitalizing experience of the self in grateful repose upon the other on the one hand, and silence as a frustration of sympathetic striving, a disappointed failure of mutuality that arises from intimate, awkward proximity of the other.”

Introspective meditations can help to strengthen relationships with other people: “So rigidly do we tend to differentiate solitude from sociality, the articulations of silent thought from the enunciated address to the other, that we risk missing the relational background sustaining these private meditations.” Louis would prefer Adeline to speak, but her silence in his presence demonstrates her refusal to communicate except on her terms, nor does she permit Louis to speak for her as they return to the abbey in “uninterrupted” silence.

Adeline finds her predisposition for sociable silence challenged when she travels away from the abbey. As long as she lives in the abbey, Adeline cannot enjoy solitude because she continuously lives in fear of the Marquis. Although glorified within the novel itself, Adeline’s introspective retreats into nature destabilize her relationship with reality, as James Watt astutely notes: “Radcliffe’s heroines indulge in the natural sublimity of mountain landscapes as a temporarily empowering release from actuality, and this form of elevated individualism remains potentially at odds with the organic and family-oriented community that is celebrated by

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69 Yousef, p. 132.
70 Yousef, p. 123.
moralizing closure.”  

Silence serves as a mediator between the two values, but is largely dependent on the ability to express oneself freely. When she attempts to reconcile her fears with her need for safety, she again finds herself an outsider. She abandons the abbey with Peter, La Motte’s trustworthy servant, and travels to Savoy, Peter’s childhood home.

   Peter finds comfort with the peace that derives from home, and is overcome with joy when he returns to his native land: “‘Thank God,’ he said, ‘we are near home; there is my dear native place. It looks as it did twenty years ago; and there are the same old trees growing round our cottage yonder, and the huge rock that rises above it’” (RF, p. 241). Upon seeing the place of his nativity, Peter lapses into reflection, the memory of the landscape blending into the present time period, but Adeline becomes ill at the sight of such happiness because it reminds her of her past suffering. She retreats to a “little cabin, where she retired to a bed; whose cleanliness was its only recommendation.” Unable to sleep, she continues to lament her condition: “‘They,’ said she, ‘have friends and relations … But during my whole life I have never known a friend; have been in general surrounded by enemies, and very seldom exempt from some circumstance either of danger or calamity.” (RF, p. 242). When Peter hears that she is unwell, he asks his friend, La Luc, to take her in as one of his family.

   The novel transitions from the mysterious and uncertain scenery that marked the first two-thirds of the novel into an idealized village. La Luc, along with his sister and daughter Clara, is the perfect image of Rousseauian simplicity, living plainly as they do with nature. Before Adeline’s arrival, the only source of discord was the death of La Luc’s wife, yet he and Clara take comfort in visiting her gravesite, thus rendering it another opportunity to rise above life’s difficulties. Adeline attempts to find peace with their community by joining them on excursions

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to the countryside: “La Luc and his little party traveled slowly on, sunk in pensive silence—a silence too pleasingly sad to be soon relinquished, and which they indulged without fear of interruption. The solitary grandeur of the scenes through which they passed, and the soothing murmur of the pines that waved above, aided this soft luxury of meditation.” (RF, p. 279). The scene’s “solitary grandeur” aids their meditation, and though together, they experience solitude as a group. The party’s silence at first seems to be a reaction to the sublime scenes around them, but as it becomes “too pleasingly sad to be soon relinquished,” the group continues in silence for its own sake. When silence moves from an involuntary reaction to something that can be “indulged without fear of interruption,” its function in the novel also shifts; characters no longer passively experience silence, but can actively seek it out.

While at first La Luc’s village seems like an ideal place to escape the Marquis, Adeline cannot find comfort while she continues to feel “unceasing anxiety for the fate of Theodore, of whom in this solitude she was less likely than ever to hear, corroded her heart, and embittered every moment of reflection” (RF, p. 259). Even while sequestered in La Luc’s utopia, Adeline laments her separation from and anxiety for Theodore.72 Adeline feels frustrated because her attempts to connect with the new town and adjacent countryside are filtered through other people’s memories: Peter of his childhood, and La Luc of his deceased wife. Although Adeline tries to make the landscape her own, her thoughts turn toward the forest surrounding the abbey where she met and fell in love with her paramour, Theodore, who stands for her longing to make

72 Radcliffe’s critique of Rousseauian simplicity resembles other Romantic novels that reveal the dangers of isolationism. Maria Edgeworth’s Belinda (1801), for example, includes a subplot wherein Clarence Hervey attempts to create an ideal wife by excluding her from society and raising her according to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s educational treatise Emile. See Maria Edgeworth, Belinda, ed. Kathryn K. Kirkpatrick (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emilius; Or, a Treatise on Education, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: A. Donaldson, 1768).
her own decisions. Adeline’s rejection of La Luc’s protection suggests that the silence is a welcome experience if it allows the mind to expand its thoughts, but not when inward reflection becomes dictated by someone else.

*THE ITALIAN’S CLAUSTROPHOBIC HOME*

While *Romance of the Forest* proposes an optimistic view of the restorative powers of nature, *The Italian* tends to be more guarded in its portrayal of sublime encounters with landscape. Like Adeline, Ellena rarely has an unmediated experience with nature because others continually disrupt her private moments, but whereas Theodore and Louis attempt to partake of nature with Adeline, Ellena receives lectures on aesthetics from her lover Vivaldi, and is continuously interrupted by Schedoni’s obsessive pursuit. Ellena transposes scenes onto the natural surroundings that allow her to find sympathy with her persecutors. Sympathy operates as a civilizing force within the novel, and is directly connected to the characters’ ability to experience silence without turmoil. Until Ellena finds a suitable and natural family, she is homeless, drifting from one place to another and in continual mental distress. Ellena eases her mind of her difficulties by creating complex natural scenes populated by imagined characters. She then draws associations between her own situation with these imagined characters in a sympathetic relationship.

Ellena’s daydreams frequently revolve around the concept of “home,” since she is uprooted from her childhood abode early in the novel, much like Adeline. Ellena’s homelessness functions as a marker for her physical and psychological displacement. Her fantasies represent some of the stylistic features of the gothic novel, and possibly, but not necessarily, a sign of her
mental distress. Sigmund Freud’s theory of the uncanny (“unheimlich,” literally, “unhomely”) identifies this effect in the works of German writer E. T. A. Hoffman. The uncanny describes the moment when one can no longer tell the difference between reality and fancy: “an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality.”

Ellena’s visions blur the boundary between her experiences and her sensations, and “home” becomes the contested site where truth and fiction become increasingly intertwined. The gothic novel’s emphasis on the mind’s relationship to different spaces anticipates twentieth-century philosopher Gaston Bachelard’s psychoanalytic reading of houses that develops the relationship between poetic spaces and language to explain the psychological roots of buildings and parts of buildings. Bachelard connects spaces, such as a house, attics, and drawers, to psychological states of being. But, he argues, such poetic spaces are only made possible through language, since providing a space for imagination to flourish is the primary function of a house: “the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.”

Although Bachelard writes of homes as physical spaces, they are as much a product of psychological creation as they are a tangible building. Ellena’s interactions with nature help her to evade her lack of “home” and to develop sympathy for her captors by allowing her to connect people with the landscape. Freud and Bachelard help to explain how physical space impacts Ellena’s mental state by showing how home operates as a stylistic representation of a place as well as a community.

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Much like Bachelard’s house, poetry and poetic language create a space that allows the characters to live within it cognitively. Ellena’s creativity, sparked by introspective moments in nature, allows her a poetic inventiveness that expands her capacity for sympathy, while avoiding becoming embittered by her captivity. Ellena’s attempts to maintain a sympathy likens her to the sentimental novel’s typical hero, but Radcliffe inverts the order of exchange: instead of feeling for someone less fortunate, Ellena emotionally connects with her oppressors. Ellena’s sophisticated expression of sympathy differs from Radcliffe’s earlier theory of sentimentality found in her first novel, The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne (1789):

When we first enter on the theatre of the world, and begin to notice its features, young imagination heightens every scene, and the warm heart expands to all around it. The happy benevolence of our feelings prompts us to believe that every body is good, and excites our wonder why every body is not happy. We are fired with indignation at the recital of an act of injustice, and at the unfeeling vices of which we are told. At a tale of distress our tears flow a full tribute to pity: at a deed of virtue our heart unfolds, our soul aspires, we bless the action, and feel ourselves the doer.⁷⁵

Radcliffe’s description of sympathy resembles that of Adam Smith, as previously discussed in the introduction, but she posits that the witness grows older. When youth encounters distress or joy for the first time, she feels it with the full force of passion; as she gains more experience, “the objects of our attention are viewed with a severer eye … The fine touch of moral susceptibility,

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by frequent irritation becomes callous; and too frequently we mingle with the world, till we are added to the number of its votaries.”

Ellena’s journey resembles that of the youth: she begins the novel with a sense of naïve trust, but she does not lose her generous feeling toward others under hardship. Her ability to commune with nature gives her the ability to continue to sympathize with her enemies and aids her survival when Schedoni captures her.

When Ellena is in the company of her persecutor, Schedoni, she remains silent, but does not succumb to the pessimism of her captor. As he escorts her to a country inn that will become her prison, each is wrapped in their own thoughts: “Schedoni, with only short intervals, was still enveloped in gloom and silence; and Ellena, with thoughts engaged by the one subject of her interest, the present situation and circumstances of Vivaldi, willingly submitted to this prolonged stillness. As, at length, she drew near Naples, her emotions became more various and powerful; and when she distinguished the top of Vesuvius peering over every intervening summit, she wept as her imagination characterized all the well-known country it overlooked” (I, p. 334). Schedoni does not converse with Ellena, so her mind turns to Vivaldi, her love interest, whose fate remains a mystery to her. As soon as she sees Vesuvius, her “emotions became more various and powerful.” The sight prompts her mind to expand, and her “imagination” creates a countryside filled with other people. She is no longer only with Schedoni, but accompanied by the “well-known” countryside. Rather than turning inward, Ellena’s perception expands outward to include not only her captor, but also the landscape. She becomes a part of the scene, as one of the many imaginary figures she invents in her mind.

Ellena’s creative impulse upon seeing Vesuvius differs from Vivaldi’s more literal interpretation. The differences between Vivaldi and Ellena’s perceptions of Vesuvius fall along

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76 Radcliffe, *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, p. 4.
gendered lines. While Ellena observes the landscape as an extension of her personal thoughts, Vivaldi turns it into an opportunity to display his knowledge about taste. Vivaldi’s description focuses on Vesuvius’s physical appearance that he appreciates as a sublime scene:

The pauses of silence, that succeeded each groan of the mountain, when expectation listened for the rising sound, affected the imagination of Vivaldi at this time with particular awe, and, rapt in thought, he continued to gaze upon the sublime and shadowy outline of the shores, and on the sea, just discerned beneath the twilight of a cloudless sky. Along its grey surface many vessels were pursuing their silent course, guided over the deep waters only by the polar star, which burned with steady luster. The air was calm, and rose from the bay with most balmy and refreshing coolness; it scarcely stirred the heads of the broad pines that overspread the villa; and bore no sounds but of the deep waves and the groans of the far-off mountain—till a chaunting of deep voices swelled in the distance. (I, p. 15)

Vivaldi attempts to teach Ellena how to view the scene as a mediated experience. Since Ellena has not received a formal education, her tastes have not been cultivated to appreciate the landscape.\(^77\) The exchange anticipates Henry Tilney’s lessons on the picturesque in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*.\(^78\) Like Tilney, Vivaldi objectively views the landscape with


“particular awe” and notes its descriptive characteristics rather than the emotional effect it has on him. The alternative moments of “rising sound” mixed with “silence” produced a sort of pleasing terror to Vivaldi. He imagines the scene with boats gliding along the water, and gives their voyage a narrative wherein their “silent course” is determined “only by the polar star.” The “deep waves and the groans of the far-off mountain” anticipate the “deep voices” chanting. The apparent serenity of the nearby convent echoes the example set by nature. Content to listen to the “the groans of the far-off mountain,” Vivaldi does not stir until he hears “deep voices” in the distance. Although there are traces of civilization in this description (the vessels on the water and the deep voices), nature does not heed the interruption of mankind. The eruptions continue steadily, the star shines with “steady luster,” and even the air is undisturbed. Although Vivaldi can give meaning to this natural scene, he cannot read Ellena’s feelings in the same way, since she expresses her sympathy through nature. Her thoughts remain a secret and she maintains her interiority by communing with nature privately as Ada Sharpe astutely notes: “Juxtaposing the silent, objectifying gaze of the hero with the suggestive signifiers of the heroine’s interiority, these tableaux signal that there are aspects of Ellena’s consciousness to which Vivaldi cannot, and perhaps should not, have access.”

Read in this way, Ellena paradoxically proves her inner worth by not revealing her thoughts. Her interpretation of the volcano signals that she does not allow Vivaldi to speak for her, nor does she allow her captivity to restrain her creativity. Silent meditation in this case is restorative rather than destructive.

Ellena’s ability to imagine scenes in nature helps her to survive the trials she experiences while Schedoni’s captive. When Ellena becomes a prisoner within the Ursaline convent, Vivaldi

attempts to rescue her, but officers of the Inquisition arrest him, leaving her defenseless and alone. Ellena is kidnapped from the convent, and taken to a house to await Schedoni. She overcomes her oppression by imagining a community to allow her to sympathize with others even without a direct connection. She takes a walk in the compound, and sees huts that she assumes are the residence of fisherman. Because she previously believed that the house was the only building in the immediate area, “the view of the huts, remote as they were, imparted a feeble hope, and even somewhat of joy” (I, p. 255). Much like she pictures the invisible inhabitants near Vesuvius, her gaze focuses on the dwellings of the fishermen, not on the coming storm, signaling a shift from simplistic reductions of landscape as the mirror of the heroine’s thoughts: “Ellena was not so wholly engaged by selfish sufferings, but that she could sympathise with those of others, and she rejoiced that the fishermen, whose boats she had observed, had escaped the threatening tempest, and were safely sheltered in their little homes” (I, p. 255). Her feelings are tumultuous like the coming storm, but her attention is fixed on the homes and the family that the huts represent. Ellena reminds herself not to think solely of her own sufferings, but to be mindful of those of others. As her thoughts turn to the idea of home, she laments that she no longer has one or “even one friend to support, to rescue me! I—a miserable wanderer on a distant shore!” (I, p. 255). As she projects her distressed conditions onto fisherman’s huts, she creates the figures on Vesuvius because she cannot articulate her sufferings to anyone else. Her mind imparts characteristics onto the landscape that reveal the extent of her self-pity. While Claudia Johnson argues that “Radcliffe’s novels tend to prohibit female complaint” by “obsessively restaging the confounding spectacle of exorbitant female suffering appropriated by men of feeling,” Radcliffe nevertheless communicates Ellena’s desires by describing her private
thoughts, thereby presenting a more complex psychological and meteorological connection than if she had simply allowed Ellena’s mind to dwell upon the storm.\(^80\)

Ellena’s contemplative solitude differs from the isolating silence exhibited by Schedoni. *The Italian*, unlike most of Radcliffe’s other novels, does not include inset poems in the narrative. Instead, each chapter begins with a descriptive epigraph; some attributed to poets, others left anonymous. The epigraph to volume 2, chapter 4, penned by Radcliffe, anticipates this turn inward:

She hears mysterious murmurs in the air,
And voices, strange and potent, hint the crime
That dwells in thought, within her secret soul. (*I*, p. 200)

In this poetic fragment, disembodied voices articulate an unspoken crime via a “secret soul.” Ellena projects her own terrors onto the surrounding landscape, allowing her to be free from her oppressors, if only in spirit not in body, but Radcliffe’s villains, Schedoni and the Marchesa, turn inward, magnifying the terror they experience because they remain trapped within their own limited worldview. Schedoni’s silence in particular is not that of a religious figure in silent prayer, but rather that of a haunted soul, as the narrator suggests: “Some few persons in the convent, who had been interested by his appearance, believed that the peculiarities in his manners, his severe reserve and unconquerable silence, his solitary habits and frequent penances, were the effect of misfortune preying upon a haughty and disordered spirit; while others conjectured them the consequence of some hideous crime gnawing upon an awakened

conscience” (I, p. 42). Portrayed in a different manner, Schedoni’s “solitary habits and frequent penances” might indicate a dedicated religious figure, but they are accompanied by “severe reserve and unconquerable silence,” his actions appear sinister and secretive. Furthermore, Schedoni represents an observed figure, not one who observes others, heightening his isolation. His silence takes on a sinister aspect because he will not participate in a sympathetic exchange, but closes himself off from society.

Radcliffe heightens the suspense by shielding Schedoni’s point of view from the reader. When Ellena tries to escape, she claims that she must return home. Her melancholy reflections are interrupted when she sees Schedoni dressed in his monk’s cowl. Due to his clothing, she assumes that he is a monk and therefore trustworthy, so she approaches him. As she draws nearer, she sees his menacing visage and loses courage: “Her confidence in his protection began to fail, and she faltered, unable to speak, and scarcely daring to meet his eyes” (I, p. 256). When she no longer believes she can turn to him, she becomes silent and he does not speak either. The novel shifts from an omniscient third-person narrator to Schedoni’s point of view. Ellena does not realize that Schedoni orchestrated her kidnapping, but the reader learns that he knows she does not speak truthfully (I, p. 257–8). At the moment when he is about to kill Ellena, the moon falls on her face and he recognizes her as his abandoned and illegitimate daughter. He hesitates, and at that moment, hears his conscience (his mind) speaking to him as disembodied voices (I, p. 268). Ellena wakes to see him carrying the dagger, and she believes that he has rescued her from Spalatro. Knowing that she is mistaken, Schedoni’s conscience terrifies him all the more:

His strong emotion, as he paced in silence the furthest end of the apartment, excited her surprise, but she then attributed it to a remembrance of the perilous
moment, from which he had rescued her. Schedoni, meanwhile, to whom her thanks were daggers, was trying to subdue the feelings of remorse that tore his heart … He continued to stalk in gloomy silence along the chamber, till the voice of Ellena, entreat ing him rather to rejoice that he had been permitted to save her, than so deeply to consider dangers which were past, again touched the chord that vibrated to his conscience, and recalled him to a sense of his situation. (I, p. 287)

Ellena projects her own thoughts onto the still figure of Schedoni, and misinterprets his silence to a “remembrance of the perilous moment, from which he had rescued her.” He does not rouse from his gloomy silence until Ellena voices her thanks. This moment changes his resolution, though he continues to remain silent and introspective: “Schedoni, meanwhile, lost in thought, broke not by a single word, the deep silence of the solitudes through which they passed. Spalatro was equally mute, and equally engaged by his reflections on the sudden change in Schedoni’s purpose” (I, p. 289). Schedoni finds himself unable to carry out his scheme once he recognizes Ellena as his daughter even though he feels duty-bound to obey the Marchesa’s orders. He reaches his redemption when he chooses to save Ellena rather than hurt her, but even as he performs this good deed, his motivations remain suspect. Because Schedoni is Ellena’s father, the novel restores his moral credibility, even though this comes across as a dramatic character shift to others. After Vivaldi is released from imprisonment from the Inquisition, he questions Schedoni, who “was silent. Vivaldi could not judge whether the pride, which occasioned his silence, was that of innocence or of remorse” (I, p. 403). Schedoni’s ambiguous role as Ellena’s pursuer permits her to absolve his deed but not necessarily his guilt, while simultaneously providing closure with her family and allowing her to marry the man of her
choosing. Although he cannot undo the terrors he imposed on his daughter, he places the blame for his actions on the Marchesa.

Both the Marchesa and Schedoni feel the effects of their conscience, which speaks their uncertainty even as they try to silence it. Before his reform, Schedoni persuades the Marchesa of the threat Ellena poses to her house by reassuring her that she is protecting her house. When he proposes to kidnap Ellena to hide her or kill her, the Marchesa outwardly thanks him for his service even as she internally questions their decision. Schedoni replies “‘Silence is sometimes eloquence,’” a reminder that prompts the Marchesa to reflect on her actions: “The Marchesa mused; for her conscience also was eloquent. She tried to overcome its voice, but it would be heard; and sometimes such starts of horrible conviction came over her mind, that she felt as one who, awaking from a dream, opens his eyes only to measure the depth of the precipice on which he totters” (I, pp. 203–4). Schedoni replies not with silence but with an admonition to be silent, thus contradicting his advice with his actions. The Marchesa responds with silence, but the narrator describes her inner turmoil. Unlike Ellena, who finds peace in silence and solitude, the Marchesa cannot retreat into her mind because she finds her consciousness inwardly reproaching her for her actions. When she imagines this figure in her mind, she thinks of a man, “awaking from a dream, [who] opens his eyes.” Her role in the crime unsexes her as she has more in common with the scheming monk than with his helpless victim. Her ambition causes her moral feeling to decay, but her love for her son also comes as a weakness when she pauses in irresolution on whether to ultimately kill Ellena and punish Vivaldi.

Schedoni scolds her for her irresolution, claiming that the fault lies in her sex: “‘Behold, what is woman!’ said he—‘The slave of her passions, the dupe of her senses! When pride and revenge speak in her breast, she defies obstacles, and laughs at crimes! Assail but her senses; let
music, for instance, touch some feeble chord of her heart, and echo to her fancy, and lo! All her perceptions change:—she shrinks from the act she had but an instant before believed meritorious yields to some new emotion, and sinks—the victim of a sound! O, weak and contemptible being!” (I, p. 207). For Schedoni, the choice to commit the crime can be reasonably justified and the Marchesa is weak because her feelings get in the way her resolution. Schedoni in particular finds fault with women’s vulnerability to the impressions caused by auditory sensations and argues that sound in particular has a direct connection to a woman’s emotional center. Though he means to connect silence with a negative connotation (in that women are so weak willed that the merest application to her sensibility can change their mind), Schedoni’s argument also links women’s strength to silence because it solidifies their resolutions, while also providing a means to achieve their desires. The suggestion that women can be overwhelmed by external sensations (leading to internal instability) hearkens back to the sentimental novel, wherein the heroines are continuously assailed by threats to their emotional health. Yet Schedoni’s criticism of the Marchesa, that her silence signals her irresolution, is actually Ellena’s strength; she remains silent to shield her intentions from her captors, which allows her to prevail when Schedoni’s plans begin to falter.

Radcliffe’s version of the gothic allows her heroines to escape danger by using silence and inward reflections to defend their honor and demonstrate their noble superiority. Though their pastoral walks are generally accompanied by somber reflections on human nature, fear and tension are temporary steps on the way to a happy ending. Radcliffe compares the solitary reflections of male and female characters to show how gender differences inhibit mutual expressions of sympathy. As we shall see in Walter Scott’s historical fiction, however, both men and women fall victim to the silencing effects of history. Whereas Adeline and Ellena utilize
silence to express agency, Lucy Ashton in *Bride of Lammermoor* perishes because she cannot express herself. In this tragic romance, Scott demonstrates that sympathy can be not only redemptive, but also dangerous.
CHAPTER TWO

Walter Scott’s Crisis of Genre: Aphasia in *Bride of Lammermoor*

Ann Radcliffe’s gothic novels as previously discussed in chapter one allow readers to escape to distant times and lands, but by and large the realism is limited to her characters, who express contemporary sensibilities. The detailed narrative landscape of *Romance of the Forest* or *The Italian*, populated with Continental mountains, valleys, and streams, may not have described real locations, but nevertheless captivated readers with their evocative imagery. Eschewing the gothic novel’s emphasis on setting, Walter Scott’s *Waverley* novels imagined how people might have reacted to past events. Scott imbues his stories with realistic representations of individuals caught in particular nodes of time, which leads twentieth-century critic Georg Lukács to identify his novels as marking the beginning of the historical novel. Scott self-consciously resists gothic and sentimental trappings, preferring to capture human nature as it appears across different events and times, yet in order to do so he relies on the assumption that history, as a masculine discipline, could be distinguished from the feminine romance.

Scott rebelled against genre restrictions in the first chapter of *Waverley; or, ’Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814) in which he outlines the reasoning for his main character’s name and the book’s subtitle. Beginning with his hero’s name, Scott claims that he did not choose “chivalrous” or “sentimental,” monikers that would unduly influence the reader’s perception prior to the start of the novel, and so “therefore, like a maiden knight with his white shield, assumed for my hero,

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WAVERLEY, an uncontaminated name, bearing with its sound little of good or evil, excepting what the reader shall be hereafter pleased to affix to it” (p. 3). While Scott claims to set up his character as a figure independent from other novels, he gives the reader a clue as to how Waverley should be read, “as a white knight,” innocent, yet still cut from a chivalric cloth.\(^{82}\)

Scott’s discussion of his subtitle reveals his conscious effort to distance his novel from the formulaic plots of his contemporaries, beginning with a rejection of the gothic novel: “Had I, for example, announced in my frontispiece, ‘Waverley, a Tale of Other Days,’ must not every novel-reader have anticipated a castle scarce less than that of Udolpho … could it have been possible for me, with a moderate attention to decorum, to introduce any scene more lively than might be produced by the jocularity of a clownish but faithful valet, or the garrulous narrative of the heroine’s fille-de-chambre, when rehearsing the stories of blood and horror which she had heard in the servants’ hall?”\(^{83}\) Scott similarly eliminates “‘Waverley, a Romance from the German’” for conjuring images of “a profligate abbot, an oppressive duke, a secret and mysterious association of Rosycrucians and Illuminati,” and a “‘Sentimental Tale,’” which would likely feature “a heroine with a profusion of auburn hair, and a harp, the soft solace of her solitary hours, which she fortunately finds always the means of transporting from castle to cottage.” (p. 4)

Scott’s systematic dismissal of various stereotypical subtitles demonstrates his overt desire to set his novel apart from the gothic, sentimental, and picaresque novels that came before. By subtitling his novel 'Tis Sixty Years Since, Scott suggests that readers consciously or unconsciously relied on a novel’s genre to correctly interpret its purpose and intent. Before his

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\(^{82}\) Charlotte Smith’s *Desmond* (1792) also included a character named Waverley, whose most prominent characteristics include “that uncommon indecision of mind, which never allows him to know what he will do a moment before he acts” (Smith, *Desmond*, ed. Antje Blank and Janet Todd [Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001], p. 50).

novel project begins, Scott already works across multiple modes to make certain that his is a uniquely original composition. Scott favors characters over specific historical events or outward trappings such as clothing by suggesting that human nature is universal, and language is a necessary component for creating a realistic portrayal of individuals. Scott characterizes *Waverley* as “more a description of men than manners,” a goal achieved by “those passions common to men in all stages of society, and which have alike agitated the human heart.”

Characters of different regions and classes interact within a particular time and place and are distinguished by the use of dialogue.

While the first chapter can be read as the celebratory genesis of the historical novel, it also registers Scott’s prejudice against female writers and characters. The genres he disparages in satirizing tones feature heroines caught in compromising situations who have no other distinguishing traits other than “a profusion of auburn hair.” Scott boasts of his mastery of the romance and the novel while acknowledging that his read is most interested in the story at hand: “I could proceed in proving the importance of a title-page, and displaying at the same time my own intimate knowledge of the particular ingredients necessary to the composition of romances and novels of various descriptions. But it is enough, and I scorn to tyrannize longer over the impatience of my reader, who is doubtless already anxious to know the choice made by an author so profoundly versed in the different branches of *his* art” (p. 5, emphasis added). Though *Waverley* was published anonymously, Scott’s ostentatious display of knowledge includes the pronoun “*his*,” specifying the author’s gender and further distancing the novel from those written by women.

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84 Scott, *Waverley*, p. 5.
The historical novel’s connection to the gothic novel suggests that Scott’s attempts to exert creative control signal his underlying anxiety of female writers and readers. Since many gothic novels were set in the past, the historical novel distinguished itself through its fidelity to known occurrences; *Waverley*, for instance, was inspired by the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. Not all of Scott’s novels, however, were directly inspired by larger, national events. *The Antiquary* (1816), set during the French Revolution, portrays an imaginary French invasion of Scotland, an event that was fictional but nevertheless represented a real anxiety for Scots living in seaside towns. *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) differs from his previous historical novels such as *Waverley* and *The Antiquary* because it is based on an old legend, which Scott embellishes with gothic allusions to supernatural phenomena to enhance the reader’s interest in the plot.

In this story of star-crossed lovers Lucy Ashton and Edgar Ravenswood, individual narratives take a more central position than historical events. When Lucy’s father, William Ashton, displaces Edgar, Master of Ravenswood as Lord Keeper, Ravenswood vows revenge on the Ashton family. He delays his vengeance when he falls in love with Lucy, disregarding a legend that states that her family will be his downfall. Despite William Ashton’s support of their union, the two separate when Ravenswood departs to the continent. In his absence, Lucy’s mother, Lady Ashton, arranges for her daughter to marry Bucklaw, the new Laird of Girnington. Ravenswood reappears at her engagement ceremony, the moment that also marks the beginning of Lucy’s descent into madness and silence. Lucy succumbs to the outside forces driving her to an arranged marriage because she represents a character type rather than a real person; as the novel tries to form her into a mere statue, Lucy’s silence provides a catalyst for the novel’s tragic

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conclusion. Lucy speaks throughout the first part of the book, only to have her voice fail when she tries to protest the trauma she experiences when she is forced to marry a man she does not love. Her outrage emerges as physical violence, a visual rather than aural signal of her rebellion.

In this novel, aphasia, the loss of language that occurs after physiological or psychological trauma, creates the narrative. Without Lucy’s silence, the novel would lose its narrative force. To that end, her silence represents a shift from an earlier model of feminine discourse. Unlike sentimental heroines, such as Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa, Lucy does not gain agency by adhering to traditional conversational models. Lucy attempts to maintain her autonomy at the expense of losing her voice but ends up surrendering both since those around her can only understand her attempted murder of Bucklaw as insanity. As Ian Duncan explains: “Lucy’s sensibility does not encode an inner integrity, the spiritual preserve of an honour lapsed in the world at large. On the contrary: the patriarchal rule of the old romance, emptied—in the removal from its historical context of values—of intrinsic ‘morality’ (now the figure of individual choice), reinforces her submission in the present.”

Duncan’s compellingly notes that Bride of Lammermoor breaks from Scott’s previous novels by abandoning a historical narrative of progress based on morality. The ending’s carnage does little to recuperate the transgressions of an earlier era. Lucy’s madness completes the tragic plot with sensationalist vigor without becoming melodramatic, as the novel suggests her violence is her last resort to escaping a man she unceasingly resists. The Bride of Lammermoor demonstrates the instability of the female presence within the historical novel, as women who challenge societal norms become lost or debilitated.

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The tenuous relationship between language and history within *Bride of Lammermoor* can be seen in the opening chapter that reintroduces Pattieson, the narrator of Scott’s “Tales of My Landlord” series, along with his friend Dick Tinto, an artist.\(^8\) Pattieson begins the novel by recounting their debate over the relative artistic effectiveness of written and visual media.

Framing narratives had long been a standard feature of Gothic novels that used this device to situate the fantastic narratives in realistic contexts while simultaneously claiming distance from the contemporary moment. Horace Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* (1764), for example, purported to be a translation of an Italian text found during the crusades.\(^9\) The framing narrative not only creates a mediated space between author and reader, but also sheds light on the creative process. Pattieson and Tinto’s conversation turns into a debate on the value of visual description over dialogue, providing further evidence of Scott’s self-conscious meditation on the art of storytelling.

The conversation begins as a discussion of stylistic preferences. Tinto claims that visual description should be favored over dialogue, which he believes obfuscates narrative. Tinto criticizes Pattieson’s stories for their overuse of uninteresting speech: “‘Your characters … make too much use of the *gob box*; they *patter* too much … there is nothing in whole pages but mere chat and dialogue.’” Tinto belittles “chat and dialogue” using slang language such as “*gob box*”

\(^8\) Scott published four series of novels that he framed as stories collected by Pattieson which were collectively known as “Tales of My Landlord.” *Bride of Lammermoor* and *A Legend of Montrose* (1819) were published as two volumes in the third series. For more on Scott’s revisions of his novels for the Magnum Opus edition, see Jane Millgate, *Scott’s Last Edition: A Study in Publishing History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1987).

and “patter” to suggest a meaningless or obscure manner of speaking that alludes to Scott’s practice of using Scottish dialect to portray the real speech of his characters. Tinto further argues that dialogue quells the reader’s engagement with the story because speaking does not move the narrative forward: “‘But as nothing … can be more dull than a long narrative written upon the plan of a drama, so where you have approached most near to that species of composition, by indulging in prolonged scenes of mere conversation, the course of your story has become chill and constrained, and you have lost the power of arresting the attention and exciting the imagination.’” Pattieson’s narratives become “chill and constrained,” according to Tinto, because dialogue does not spark the imaginative response that an image would. Pattieson responds to Tinto’s charge by arguing that speech builds character development: “‘The ancient philosophy … was wont to say, “Speak, that I may know thee;” and how is it possible for an author to introduce his personae dramatis to his readers in a more interesting and effectual manner, than by the dialogue in which each is represented as supporting his own appropriate character?’” (p. 21). Pattieson concedes that his characters’ language may seem arcane or unintelligible at first glance, but he argues speech conveys their true characters better than mere description. Dialogue permits the narrator to introduce characters in an “interesting and effectual manner”—dialogue, or speech, prompts the listener or reader to stay engaged with the text in an economic manner. Pattieson appeals to the distinction between the senses and replies, “‘that he [Tinto] confounded the operations of the pencil and the pen; that the serene and silent art, as painting has

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90 The Oxford English Dictionary defines “patter” as “any language not generally understood, especially the jargon of a social group or subculture,” particularly language used by lower-class people. See OED, “patter,” n., 1b,

been called by one of our first living poets, necessarily appealed to the eye, because it had not the organs for addressing the ear; whereas poetry, or that species of composition which approached to it, lay under the necessity of doing absolutely the reverse, and addressed itself to the ear, for the purpose of exciting that interest which it could not attain through the medium of the eye”” (p. 22). Painting and writing differ in how they are perceived by the human body; painting cannot be heard because it is a visual art and therefore silent, while presumably words cannot convey the vivid imagery of art. Pattieson appeals to the senses: painting and drawing are perceived by the eye, and poetry and narrative by the ear. Writing has the advantage of encompassing both the ear and the eye; it can be silently read, or it can be spoken out loud. Dialogue, or speech, is a necessary component to narrative, especially when based on an oral tradition such as those on which Scott relies to generate his stories. Pattieson does not differentiate between form and content; instead, he suggests that both “pencil and pen” can be used to tell a story; pencil in this case as an instrument used to create both sketches and words.\footnote{Ann Jessie Van Sant argues that “understanding the traditional significance of sight in moving the passions … is crucial to an understanding of the pathetic presentations that characterize the age of sensibility” (\textit{Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context} [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993], p. xi).}


The framing debate suggests that Scott views visual and written media to be far from equivocal, but that each contributes unique perspectives by appealing to different senses. Tinto’s preference for visual description echoes that of neoclassical philosophers who favored picturesque settings. Neoclassicism’s interest in vivid description stems from the revival of Homer’s phrase, “\textit{ut}
picture poesis,” which Hagstrum argues served as “a reminder to the poet that the example of painting proved that art could achieve power only to the extent that it was the closest possible contact with visible reality.”\footnote{Hagstrum, p. 62. W. J. T. Mitchell’s discussion of the pictorial turn in modernist criticism offers a twentieth-century extension of this debate (Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation, [Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994]).} Pattieson’s disagreement, then, represents not simply a friendly rivalry, but a turn from a system of pictoral writing that dominated eighteenth-century poetry. The stakes of their disagreement involve not only the value of writing over painting, but also the value of dialogue as a narrative technique.

Scott indicates his support for Pattieson’s point of view by presenting their debate as a dialogue. Pattieson elevates writing, and particularly dialogue, as worthy of being in a debate about taste, even though its association with common language has caused it to be traditionally considered as a lesser art than painting or sculpture. Writing records a visual representation of spoken communication rather than create something new. Jacques Rancière’s account of the development of literature reframes the history of writing to account for both the process and the objects that are produced by the act. Rancière argues that writing was originally viewed as merely replicating and imitating speech, and in the process destroying its uniqueness: Socrates perceived that “writing is like a mute painting, only capable of imitating one thing and repeating it endlessly … this muteness makes the written word too talkative.”\footnote{Jacques Rancière, Mute Speech, trans. James Swenson (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1998), p. 93.} The problematic connection between sign and signifier means that written language must over determine its connection to spoken language, and as a result repeats itself ad infinitum until language loses its original meaning. The proliferating echoes “muddle[] the way in which knowledge and discourse...
order visibility and establish authority.”96 This in turn creates a type of silence achieved via an excess of speech, much like Tinto’s “patter” means nothing unless the listener understands it. Unless the speaker and listener are of the same group, language will be unintelligible through a proliferation of signification that acts at cross-purposes. Given Scott’s preoccupation with the relationship between society and history, Rancière’s analysis of literature as a category helps to define the stakes of Tinto and Pattieson’s argument as one that addresses the relationship between an artistic creator and his or her subject: to what extent does a writer or painter have an allegiance to the subject’s history? What mode can most faithfully portray the story?97

Tinto’s critique of the written word is that it represents a partial understanding of the action: from the character’s point of view, as expressed through conversation or dialogue, or from a narrator’s perspective, in which words “capture” or “caption” the scene as a synopsis of the actions. But the limitation of painting is that it can only represent a particular moment in time. It cannot show the cause or effect of an individual’s actions, nor can it relate conversations. Nonetheless, Tinto concludes that the visual arts are superior because he prefers the immediacy of viewing a painting, which he likens to a glimpse of the past, present, and future captured in one vivid moment: “you have accustomed yourself so much to these creeping twilight details of yours, that you are become incapable of receiving that instant and vivid flash of conviction, which darts on the mind from seeing the happy and expressive combinations of a single scene, and which gathers from the position, attitude, and countenance of the moment, not only the history of the past lives of the personages represented, and the nature of the business on which

96 Rancière, p. 94.
97 James Chandler argues that the “first two thirds of the book narrates, in effect, a contest of scene setting” for Lucy’s breakdown (England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism [Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998], p. 330). To that end, Pattieson’s debate with Tinto determines how the reader should approach other narrative tableaus.
they are immediately engaged, but lifts even the veil of futurity, and affords a shrewd guess at their future fortunes” (p. 24). Art, according to Tinto, expresses individual character, the events taking place, and offers an opportunity to see into the future. While Tinto argues that painting permits narrative to be seen at a single glance, at best the viewer can only anticipate the conclusion and forecloses the possibility of the characters’ own agency.

Pattieson gamely decides to take Tinto’s advice to use visual description over dialogue whenever possible. Tinto presents Pattieson with a scrapbook of sketches for inspiration, and despite his objection to Pattieson’s use of “creeping twilight details,” the narrator vividly describes the antiquated images:

The sketch, which was cleverly executed, to use the appropriate phrase, represented an ancient hall, fitted up and furnished in what we now call the taste of Queen Elizabeth’s age. The light, admitted from the upper part of a high casement, fell upon a female figure of exquisite beauty, who, in an attitude of speechless terror, appeared to watch the issue of a debate betwixt two other persons. The one was a young man, in the Vandyke dress common to the time of Charles I., who, with an air of indignant pride, testified by the manner in which he raised his head and extended his arm, seemed to be urging a claim of right, rather than of favor, to a lady, whose age, and some resemblance in her features, pointed her out as the mother of the younger female, and who appeared to listen with a mixture of displeasure and impatience. (p. 23)

The narrator situates the image as taking place in “Queen Elizabeth’s age” by calling attention to
the dress and attitudes of the figures. While the sketch’s visual elements seem to take
prominence in the description, Pattieson interprets the figures’ gestures as representing various
emotions: a young woman watches “in an attitude of speechless terror,” while an older woman,
presumably her mother, “appeared to listen with a mixture of displeasure and impatience.” That
both of these women should be silent is not particularly surprising since an image is a mode of
communication that does not “speak,” but by drawing a distinction between “speechless terror”
and “listening,” the narrator introduces an element of pathos that colors the way readers
approach the ensuing novel.

Scott experiments with a picture’s narrative potential in an earlier novel, *The Antiquary.*
A similar tapestry appears to come to life, a scene that represents Scott working though the
challenges with the limited narrative scope, which he overcomes by presenting the inset story as
a dream told from the protagonist’s perspective. After Lovel falls asleep, he imagines that the
tapestry across from him moves: “Insensibly the legend of Aldobrand Oldenbuck, and his
mysterious visits to the inmates of the chamber, awoke in his mind, and with it, as we often feel
in dreams, an anxious and fearful expectation, which seldom fails instantly to summon up before
our mind’s eye the object of our fear. Brighter sparkles of light flashed from the chimney with
such intense brilliancy, as to enlighten all the room. The tapestry waved wildly on the wall, till
its dusky forms seemed to become animated.”

History, or the legend told to him that evening, sparks his imagination to believe the figures on the tapestry come to life. At first, Lovel watches
a reenactment of a hunt, with figures displayed in bright colors and the sounds of trumpet music
filling the room. Then, as the scene continues, Lovel distinguishes the figure approaching him
directly. Aldobrand shows him a volume, but without speaking: “Aldobrand held up his finger,

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as if to impose silence upon the guest who had intruded on his apartment, and began deliberately to unclasp the venerable volume which occupied his left hand … Although the language was unknown to our dreamer, his eye and attention were both strongly caught by the line which the figure seemed thus to press upon his notice, the words of which appeared to blaze with a supernatural light, and remained riveted upon his memory. ”\(^99\) The tapestry tells a narrative that cannot voice its characters’ individual desires. Scott ends the mis-en-scène when Lovel wakes up, allowing the imagined scene to exist both within and outside the scene in a form of gothic memory. *Bride of Lammermoor* similarly relies on an image to set the stage, and the novel enacts the events described.

The novel is based on the death of Janet Dalrymple, who, like Lucy Ashton, became secretly engaged to a man not of her parents’ choosing, and, having suffered a breakdown on her wedding night, stabbed her husband before found in a chimney. Scott writes of the terror created by Lady Dalrymple: “it is needless to point out to the intelligent reader, that the witchcraft of the mother consisted only in the ascendancy of a powerful mind over a weak and melancholy one” (p. 10). Despite this conclusion, the novel adds a large dose of the fantastic to the story’s mysterious circumstances. The ensuing story, according to the framing device, is Pattieson’s interpretation of Tinto’s notebook, wherein he recorded the outlines of the story as told to him by an “aged goodwife who was well acquainted with the history of the castle,” along with “outlines of caricatures, sketches of turrets, mills, old gables, and dovecots” (p. 25). This fictional account of the novel’s genesis was the only one available until the publication of the Magnum Opus edition, which included an introduction by Scott that explains the mysterious circumstances using psychological motivations. Tinto’s sketch provides a focal point for the narrative, but even

though the text switches between various viewpoints, Lucy’s viewpoint always comes to the reader through another character. The text describes her actions, but she does not speak for herself. Lucy’s silence challenges the plot’s momentum as it has the potential to draw the story into an earlier, outdated style. The inclusion of the framing narrative shows that Scott’s usually boastful authorial persona was far from certain that his experiment with using an image as a source of narrative inspiration would succeed. Without relying on dialogue, he needed to incorporate more silent moments within the story, thereby opening the novel to the overused nonlinguistic expressions of the sentimental novel from which he worked to distance his works in the first chapter of *Waverley*.

**HISTORY OR LEGEND?**

Lucy’s madness results from her inability to reconcile the competing forces of history on the one hand, and fate on the other. *Bride of Lammermoor* relies on legend more than Scott’s previous novels, and in some sense returns to the ground Scott covered in his poetry.¹⁰⁰ Unlike *Waverley* or *The Antiquary*, the timeline of *Bride of Lammermoor* is not historically bound. In the first edition, Scott places the actions in the novel before the Act of Union (1707), but the Magnum Opus edition (1830) places the action after 1707.¹⁰¹ Even though *Bride of Lammermoor*’s plot is based on a purportedly real event, the story is worthy of legend according to Scott. Many critics have sought to explain why *Bride* appears out of step with Scott’s previous novels by focusing on the ways that Ravenswood and Lady Ashton represent alternatives to

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¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Scott, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel: A Poem* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1805).
¹⁰¹ See Robertson, introduction to *Bride of Lammermoor*, p. xxxiv.
Scottish nationalism. James Reed, for example, situates the conflict between Ravenswood and the Ashtons in the changing nature of land ownership and suggests that Ravenswood is culpable in Lucy’s death because he is stuck in an antiquated time and cannot adapt to a new political system: “The world of Lammermoor holds only two possibilities, both unattractive: a decadent, old but independent Scotland, and a corrupt, new Anglicized one.” Reed suggests that the novel’s gothic tone is in part due to Scott’s political ambivalence. Jane Millgate comes to a similar conclusion: “both Ravenswood and Sir William Ashton are in some sense out of step with the times and thereby rendered largely powerless.” Millgate suggests that the power of Bride of Lammermoor rests in the story’s reliance on fate and the supernatural. James Watt explains that the blurring between history and legend creates the narrative constraints in the novel, especially when different narratives alternatively heighten or disregard fate: “What complicates the identity or tone of The Bride above all is the way that it offers competing forms of explanation for the events which it portrays, seeming intermittently both to credit and distance itself from a ‘traditional’ perspective on the fulfillment of omen and prophecy.” For Watt, the legend’s prophecy operates as a narrative device, making the conclusion feel predestined and creating a form of temporal anxiety. By relying on assertion rather than facts, Scott produces a text that defies the expectations set by his previous historical novels.

Pattieson makes an ironic apology for the text’s flattening of the characters’ motivations toward the end of the novel: “By many readers this may be deemed over-strained, romantic, and composed by the wild imagination of an author, desirous of gratifying the popular appetite for

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104 James Watt, Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict, 1764–1832 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), p. 149.
the horrible” (p. 340) The narrator drops the artificial historical framework, alluding to the need to satisfy readers with fantastic stories, only to pick it up again by insisting that the novel is in fact based on “AN OWER TRUE TALE.” “This belated appeal to historical fact,” according to Fiona Robertson, “only draws attention to the way in which the tale has, in practice, both fallen into the narrative patterns of sensationalist fiction and become dependent on these patterns for its retelling.”105 Robertson points out that Tinto’s challenge determines not only the novel’s structure, but also its content. The narrator’s commitment to visual depiction leads the story to increasingly strange locations, and the plot relies on supernatural forces and visual descriptions to keep the interest high, since the reader already knows what is about to happen. The supernatural events depend on rich descriptive language, forgoing a realistic tone.

Scott’s focus on local rather than national events humanizes conflicts and reinforces their immediacy in the present moment. The opening chapter does not merely foreshadow, but explicitly outlines the events, anticipating the character’s reactions before they have a chance to respond, leaving them without agency. Bride of Lammermoor, more than Scott’s other novels, relies on a constant drive to the climax to move the plot. Before Ravenswood decides to end his association with Lucy, his servant, Caleb tells him about a prophecy that foretells the end of his House:

“When the last Laird of Ravenswood to Ravenswood shall ride,
And woo a dead maiden to be his bride,
He shall stable his steed in the Kelpie’s flow,
And his name shall be lost for evermoe!” (p. 185)

Ravenswood discounts Caleb’s warning and masks his skepticism as pragmatism, but his vow of revenge against the Ashtons blinds him to the mystical danger that surrounds him. The legend states that Ravenswood will find a stable in Kelpie’s flow, a low area that Ravenswood already knows has dangerous quicksand spots. Ravenswood’s prior experience in the area could reinforce Caleb’s prophecy, but he refuses to accept the legend and instead pits history against spoken knowledge. Oral tradition fails to save Ravenswood from his fate a second time when he foolishly ignores Alice, a blind hermit who has counseled generations of Ravenswood’s family, who similarly advises him to avoid the Mermaiden’s Well, a fountain deep in the woods near the Keep. Alice tries to warn Ravenswood that “Often has [the Mermaiden’s Well] been called a place fatal to the race of Ravenswood—often has it proved so—but never was it likely to verify old sayings as much as on this day,” but he calls her “more silly and more superstitious than old Balderstone” (p. 201). Alice gives credibility to “old sayings,” the premise upon which the novel is based. Ravenswood’s inability to reconcile past information with the forward-looking prophecy not only reflects his stubborn personality, but also signals a larger problem with orality, as Penny Fielding explains: “on the one hand, the oral is something every one knows, it is shared experience, communal knowledge, the wisdom of the people. On the other hand, the oral cannot really be known at all because of its habit of vanishing without record into the past. The oral is oddly positioned between the absolute, and the absolutely conditional: the very concept of a ‘saying’ is of an unchanging general truth, yet the need to locate the oral in a lost or fading past imbues it with fragility and provisionality.”106 Alice’s prophecy represents a fleeting form of knowledge, one that Ravenswood must dismiss outright according to legend, an act that signals

the problems associated with using oral legend as a narrative base. To continue one legend, the plot must discount another.

The location at the center of Alice’s prophecy, the Mermaid’s Well, represents a psychological space of being—the place where Lucy and Ravenswood fall in love—and a supernatural spot. Alice’s vision echoes nineteenth-century anxiety about mermaids that viewed them as monsters positioned outside of natural taxonomies that resembled humans with animalistic characteristics. The figure of the mermaid stands at the intersection between myth and history, since they were linked to nymphs and sirens, or more broadly women whose sexuality exceeds their traditional roles. Mermaids held a special interest in British culture, particularly due to expanded maritime explorations. The British Museum hosted regular exhibitions of mermaid specimens starting in the mid-eighteenth century and Adriana Craciun chronicles their appearance in poems by Letitia Landon and Anne Bannerman.107 Some nineteenth century versions of mermaids tried to contain their power by making them innocent figures. Take Hans Christian Andersen’s story “The Little Mermaid” (1837), for instance.108 In the original version of this tale, the heroine falls in love with a prince and saves him from drowning. She wants to be human in order to be with him, so she sells her tongue for a potion that will give her the most beautiful legs in the world. Since she cannot speak, she can only woo the prince with her dancing, but when she moves, she feels like she is on sharp needles. The prince disregards her affections and falls in love with a princess who he thinks saved him. On the day of their wedding, the Little Mermaid turns into sea foam and eventually rises into the air because she strove to gain an eternal soul. Andersen’s reading of the mermaid legend introduces

the traumatic effects of silence and makes the mermaid into a passive figure who can hope to achieve immortality, but not love.

Like Andersen’s version of the mermaid myth, *Bride of Lammermoor* foreshadows Lucy’s death when she tries to gain Ravenswood’s love despite her family’s objections and loses her voice. Ravenswood meets Lucy in the woods and cannot break off their relationship despite his resolution. He finds her beauty all the more irresistible “by the consciousness that she had placed her affections on him” (p. 205). The description of Lucy when she arrives to meet Ravenswood further emphasizes the narrative’s reliance on legends: “To a superstitious eye, Lucy Ashton, folded in her plaided mantle, with her long hair, escaping partly from the snood and falling upon her silver neck, might have suggested the idea of the murdered Nymph of the Fountain. But Ravenswood only saw a female exquisitely beautiful, and rendered yet more so to his eyes—how could it be otherwise—by the consciousness that she had placed her affections on him” (p. 205). Lucy’s clothing and hair resemble the “murdered Nymph of the Fountain,” but Ravenswood sees an “exquisitely beautiful” woman who returns his love. The connection between Lucy and the Nymph foreshadows Lucy’s misfortunes, and suggests that Ravenswood’s incredulity is foolish since Lucy is the agent who leads to their downfall.

The rapidness with which Lucy and Ravenswood fall in love is not due to the intense passion they feel for each other, but because the narrative demands that they be together so that later events can draw them apart: “instead of bidding her farewell, he gave his faith to her for ever, and received her troth in return. The whole passed so suddenly, and arose so much out of the immediate impulse of the moment, that ere the Master of Ravenswood could reflect upon the circumstances of the step which he had taken, their lips, as well as their hands, had pledged the sincerity of their affection” (p. 207). Ravenswood falls in love with Lucy allegedly for her
feminine delicacy and the calming influence she has on his temper and unruly passions, but she holds a mysterious power over him that he cannot explain. Structurally, once the narrative prepares the reader to expect the prophecy’s fulfillment, the meeting between Lucy and Ravenswood feels anticlimactic.

To outside observers Caleb and Alice, Ravenswood falls victim to his pride because he will not heed the legend’s warning, but his skepticism falters when he sees her fate in a vision at the Mermaid’s Well. After their engagement, he returns to the Mermaid’s Well and encounters a ghostly figure that looks like Lucy: “On looking to the fountain, Ravenswood discerned a female figure, dressed in a white, or rather grayish mantle, placed on the very spot on which Lucy Ashton had reclined while listening to the fatal tale of love” (p. 245). He approaches, thinking it is Lucy, but instead he imagines Alice’s ghost: “As he approached, she arose slowly from her seat, held her shriveled hand up as if to prevent his coming more near, and her withered lips moved fast, although no sound issued from them” (p. 246). The spectral figure appears to say something, but is silent. Even though the figure does not give Ravenswood an explicit warning, he rushes from the Well to Alice’s hut, only to find that she died at approximately the same time that Ravenswood sees the figure. In this instance, silence provides a more cautionary foretelling than the legends Caleb and Alice recount. This scene’s acute vision of Lucy’s silence (in the form of a ghostly representation by Alice) relies on descriptive language rather than dialogue.109

109 See Peter Garside: “The Bride of Lammermoor at the Mermaid’s fountain, engraved by John Romney, in which Edgar Ravenswood pledges his love for Lucy Ashton, against an ominous woodland background, subsequently [became] one of the most frequently illustrated episodes in Scott” (“Illustrating the Waverley Novels: Scott, Scotland, and the London Print Trade, 1819–1836,” The Library 11, 2 (June 2010): 168–96, 172). In addition to Romney’s engraving, John Everett Millais’s The Bride of Lammermoor (1878) features Ravenswood and Lucy at the Mermaid’s Well. The couple faces the viewer directly, and Lucy is draped in a red plaid shawl
When Ravenswood finds that he can no longer differentiate between his own imagination and reality when he lacks a realistic explanation for the appearance of Alice’s ghost, he believes against his will that the event happens in the spiritual realm. Ian Duncan argues that this moment acts as a slippage between the historical novel and the gothic imagination: “After the vision by the fountain Edgar falls under a Gothic narrative rhetoric, in which he is figured less and less as an individual who may internalize his conflicts as a matter of conscience and choice, increasingly as the external character of an allegory of loss of historical place and identity.”

Ravenswood comes to represent pure passion rather than a realistic character drawn from nature.

In line with Pattieson’s pledge to rely on visual description more than language, Ravenswood transforms into a representative type of a tragic figure. Ravenswood’s skepticism slides into ruthless determination to avenge Lucy’s death, whatever the cost. Caleb tries to stop Ravenswood from rushing into a duel with Lucy’s brother, but again Ravenswood ignores his warning. When he rides to meet Colonel Ashton, Ravenswood disappears into Kelpie’s flow as if he “melted into the air” (p. 347). From the spectator’s point of view, it seems that Ravenswood vanishes by supernatural means, but the narrative logically concludes that he simply sank into quicksand. With his death comes the completion of the tragedy, foreclosing the possibility of escape. As Duncan explains, once the narrative erases his individuality, Ravenswood’s rebellion against Lucy’s brother no longer represents the disagreement that drove them apart, but a fulfillment of the prophecy. Though he was aware that Kelpie’s flow is a dangerous area, he rides into it without thinking. Caleb’s legend, which Ravenswood had once regarded as superstition, appears as a rational warning to consider the consequences of actions, but fails to

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that foreshadows her fate, with Ravenswood at her side in dull brown attire. Eugene Delacroix (1826) painted a sketch of Lucy and Bucklaw’s wedding night, one of the only renderings that departed from the scene at the Mermaid’s Well.

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110 Duncan, p.143.
prevent the tragic ending. Ravenswood tries to neutralize the prophecy’s dangerous implications by ignoring it, but his failure to heed it suggests that silencing its warning cannot alter his fate. Similarly, Lucy tries to warn Ravenswood of her impending marriage, but like the omen, her complaints are silenced when he does not receive them.

THE FAILURE OF LUCY’S LETTERS

Language fails to bring consensus between rival families in *Bride of Lammermoor*. Lucy is not entirely without agency, but her attempts to express herself are not enough to overcome fate. Her resort to violence comes as an inevitable response to her wedding, but that contrasts with her otherwise placid behavior. Lucy refuses her mother’s demands to marry Bucklaw by writing clandestine letters to Ravenswood, who has left for the continent, telling him her plight and urging him to return. The letters provide tangible evidence of her resistance since a woman’s letter had a fraught position in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries. In the sentimental novel, letters were often the sites of desire and hidden passions, while threatening a woman’s virtue. “The woman’s letter,” argues Nicola J. Watson, “concentrates in the most heady and potent form the complex of desire and transgression,” and Lucy’s letter, representing her repressed love for Ravenswood, is no different. Ravenswood receives three letters, but the novel only reprints two letters in full, one from Lady Ashton (which she signs Margaret Douglas) and another from Lucy (signed L.A.). The third letter from Sir William is presented as a summary. Although the women’s printed letters ostensibly allows them to voice their opinions

and desires, it demonstrates their relational position in the novel’s power dynamics since Ravenswood only responds to Sir William’s correspondence successfully.

Lady Ashton asks Ravenswood to refrain from pursuing her daughter, but Lucy manages to send him correspondence informing him of her engagement to Bucklaw. Lucy’s letter, sent without her mother’s knowledge, provides further information about her situation: “‘I received yours, but it was at the utmost risk; do not attempt to write again till better times. I am sore beset, but I will be true to my word, while the exercise of my reason is vouchsafed to me. That you are happy and prosperous is some consolation, and my situation requires it all’” (p. 290). Her letter demonstrates that she still obeys her parents, holding Ravenswood at arm’s length and delaying his advances. Her words are cold compared to the reception he received before he left, so he tries to write to her to no avail: “This letter [Lucy’s] filled Ravenswood with the most lively alarm. He made many attempts, notwithstanding her prohibition, to convey letters to Miss Ashton, and even to obtain an interview; but his plans were frustrated” (p. 290). Since his letters do not arrive, Lady Ashton interprets his silence as tacit approval of Lucy’s engagement to Bucklaw, and claims that “all the friends of the family are of opinion, and my dear Lucy herself ought so to think, that, as this unworthy person has returned no answer to her letter, silence must on this, as in other cases, be held to give consent” (p. 299). Ravenswood’s lack of reply shifts the gendered dynamic of his silence. Whereas the sentimental novel often portrayed a woman’s silence as an affirmation, in this case Lucy resists her engagement by writing to Ravenswood and asking him to intervene, but her mother notes that his silence is itself an indication of his permission for Lucy to marry Bucklaw after waiting one year. Even when Lucy voices her disapproval, she requires a man to authorize her desire.

Lady Ashton effectively stops Lucy’s efforts to communicate with Ravenswood because
she continues to organize her daughter’s engagement with Bucklaw. Her role as Lucy’s mother trumps the social pact Lucy made with Ravenswood by giving him her vow. When Ravenswood reappears at the end of her engagement ceremony, Lucy falls silent because she does not want to disobey her mother but does not have a way to escape the marriage. Lucy signs the wedding contract with an unintelligible scribble, an act that reaffirms her mother’s powerful position over her. In her collection of essays on objectification, Rae Langton identifies the control over another’s speech as a negation of J. L. Austin’s performative utterance: “If you are powerful, you sometimes have the ability to silence the speech of the powerless. On way might be to stop the powerless from speaking at all … But there is another, less dramatic but equally effective, way. Let them speak. Let them say whatever they like to whomever they like, but stop that speech from counting as an action. More precisely, stop it from counting as the action it was intended to be … Some speech acts are unspeakable for women in some contexts: although the appropriate words can be uttered, those utterances fail to count as the actions they were intended to be.”

Lady Ashton’s censorship of her daughter’s letter is not only acceptable, but also expected, and by refusing to assign meaning or significance to it, she strips Lucy of her ability to speak. Mary Favret persuasively argues that the “anxiety of maternal influence,” created by the “the mother’s supervision and dictation of the daughter’s writing,” leads to “an end to the epistolary scheme” in that letters no longer represent the free expression of its writer. Lucy’s mother censors her correspondence because it represents Lucy’s attempt to act independently. When Lucy’s efforts fail, her letters to Ravenswood create another narrative rift. Even though Ravenswood interrupts the engagement ceremony, Lucy’s upcoming marriage to Bucklaw moves forward, despite his

skepticism of her seeming change of heart.

Bucklaw interprets Lucy’s reluctance to marry him as that of a coquette who plays games with her lovers: “I never knew much of that sort of fine ladies, and I believe they may be a capricious as the devil; but there is something in Miss Ashton’s change, a devilish deal too sudden, and too serious for a mere flisk of her own. I’ll be bound Lady Ashton understands every machine for breaking in the human mind, and there are as many as there are cannon-bits, martingales, and cavessons for young colts” (p. 294). He likens her to a “young colt” that must be broken, but his metaphor describes Lucy’s mother, not himself, as the agent who will tame her. His not quite admiring assessment of Lady Ashton capabilities—she “understands every machine for breaking in the human mind”—likens her to a military strategist. His description evokes instruments of torture, especially when Lucy’s mental strength starts to wane: “[Lucy’s] health also began to be shaken, and her hectic cheek and wandering eye gave symptoms of what is classed a fever upon the spirits; but Lady Ashton, compact and him of purpose, saw these waverings of health and intellect with no greater sympathy that that with which the hostile engineer regards the towers of a beleaguered city as they reel under the discharge of his artillery” (p. 309).\(^{114}\) Lady Ashton behaves as if marriage were a strategic maneuver, a practical interpretation that is completely at odds with Lucy’s love for Ravenswood. Lady Ashton wants to keep Lucy and Ravenswood apart, not to protect her daughter from tragedy, but to secure her position. Like Lady Ashton, Bucklaw knows that his marriage will politically unite her house to his estate and not to the old lords of Ravenswood, thus securing his recently acquired political position through both marriage and military strength. Even so, Bucklaw loves Lucy, and ever the strategist, he knows that he will have a happier marriage if she returns his affection. Since Lucy

\(^{114}\) As a bargaining chip to bring the Ashtons and Bucklaws together, she is presented as an object that would not have the ability to speak in the first place. See Lynch, pp. 123–33.
had previously rejected his offers, he astutely guesses that Lady Ashton has arranged the engagement, yet by placing the blame on Lady Ashton, he absolves himself of his complicity in the affair. Lady Ashton’s use of tactics seems devoid of sentimentalism, but she exists within a realist framework, not the supernatural realm. Her disconnectedness from the legend should protect her daughter, but instead she becomes another source of trauma for Lucy, who suffers the effects of her mother’s machinations.

VIOLENCE AND SILENCE

The end of *Bride of Lammermoor* represents the fullest commitment to visual representation in the novel, but the silence of the scene causes the narrative to feel incomplete. Textual and verbal silences fix the violence and trauma within the narrative, rendering moot any hint at progress the novel might offer. Moments of silence happen before, during, and after Lucy’s wedding night. First, the text does not include details of Lucy’s attempted murder of Bucklaw and possible rape because when the newlyweds leave for their chamber, the viewpoint switches to that of the guests so that the only witnesses to the bloodshed are the parties involved. Second, after he recovers, Bucklaw refuses to speak about the events. Lucy’s outburst—“So you have ta’en up your bonny bridegroom?”—reinforces her silence rather than illuminates her motivations, and further emphasizes the “unutterable agony of the parents—the horror and confusion of all who were in the castle—the fury of contending passions between the friends of the different parties” (p. 338). Finally, Lucy’s death leaves the narrative unresolved and ends the possibility of a progressive future. The characters’ muteness during the climax and conclusion
suggests that all are powerless to escape the force of history and underscore the senseless suffering that makes the ending so tragic.

Since the novel turns away from Lucy’s point of view at the moment of her trauma, the text relies on descriptive excess that borders on melodrama to convey the emotional pull of the climax. The reader witnesses Lucy’s suffering, but since she cannot articulate it even internally, the text holds it at a distance by offering few opportunities to sympathize with her pain. The text’s silence with regards to her suffering suggests the failure of witness to gain sympathy with another. Lucy’s recursive silence connects her with other Romantic heroines caught in what Elizabeth A. Dolan identifies as a web of cognitive awareness of trauma: “the attempt to see women’s suffering constitutes a complex field of vision—the overlapping and sometimes clashing gaze of the one whose vision defines, marks, or sympathizes with the sufferer and the gaze of the sufferer herself—both what she sees and how her visual activity appears to others.”

Though Lucy may be self-aware of her suffering, other characters merely think of her behavior in terms of prescribed gender norms. Her silence represents a reflection of what other characters want her to be or say: sensitive beauty to Ravenswood, presumed consent to Bucklaw, or willful disobedience to Lady Ashton. Other characters defer to traditional gender roles rather than sympathize with Lucy’s silences. Since she cannot express herself using language, Lucy “finally enact[s] rather than voice[s] her feelings,” according to Robertson. When Lucy demonstrates agency by forcefully resisting Bucklaw on their wedding night, the text relegates her actions outside the immediate narrative.

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116 Robertson, introduction to *Bride of Lammermoor*, p. xxvii.
In her distress, Lucy resists opening the ball, forcing Lady Ashton to lead the guests in the first dance. Lucy and Bucklaw leave the reception at the most festive part of the evening, and the narrative momentarily advances without them until “a cry was heard so shrill and piercing, as at once to arrest the dance and the music” (p. 337). The text does not designate whether Lucy or Bucklaw screams, but when the guests enter the bedroom they find Bucklaw groaning on the floor surrounded by blood. The scene anticipates Lucy’s violence, but neither her presence nor voice are needed to explain the events. Her previous suffering creates new terror, but since no one outside the parties involved witness the event, no one finds her guilty; she dies before the judge appears, who arrives at the “general hypothesis, that the bride, in a sudden fit of insanity, had stabbed the bridegroom at the threshold of the apartment” (p. 339). Violence becomes a disembodied force that does not require an agent to produce a textual effect.

Left alone, violence would proliferate, without a clear origin and ceaseless in its potential for destruction, an affective force that exists without a body. “The trauma produces something in the air without that thing having to be more concrete than a sense of the uncanny,” argues Lauren Berlant, who claims that Lucy’s silence provides a vessel for which to place objectless violence.117 The scene destabilizes Lucy’s identity, making it more difficult for readers and other characters to sympathize with her suffering. Robertson locates her silence within a specifically female social register: “Lucy’s decline into incoherence and silence are important registers of her social helplessness and, at the same time, the only way that the novel can contain the spectacle of female violence to which it is inevitably drawn.”118 My reading concurs with Robertson’s assessment of Lucy’s silence, which can be extended to the novel’s more generalized critique of the effectiveness of dialogue to create a sympathetic bond. Lucy’s actions are shocking because

118 Robertson, introduction to *Bride of Lammermoor*, p. xxvii.
the characters construe her silence as passive acceptance. One form of agency (her violent actions) would beget another (an ability to speak), but instead she falls silent, leaving her actions incomprehensible to the wedding guests, who interpret her refusal to speak after she stabs Bucklaw as insanity or madness. After the guests rush into the room, they find Lucy in the chimney: “Here they found the unfortunate girl, seated, or rather crouched like a hare upon its form—her head-gear disheveled; her night-clothes torn and dabbled with blood,—her eyes glazed, and her features convulsed into a wild paroxysm of insanity. When she saw herself discovered, she gibbered, made mouths, and pointed at them with her bloody fingers, with the frantic gestures of an exulting demoniac” (pp. 337–8). The description likens Lucy to an animal; she is “crouched like a hare” and makes noises but doesn’t speak. Yet Lucy has been unable to speak for pages, since her engagement to Bucklaw. When they find her, she speaks her last words: “So, you have ta’en up your bonny bridegroom?” Lucy’s bridegroom is not “hers,” but rather “your”—the witnesses. Lucy’s refusal to acknowledge Bucklaw as her husband signals her disavowal of her marriage, and indicates that her aphasia expresses her interior state better than her words.

The narrative saves the moment of most intense demonstration of Lucy’s agency for a line of dialogue, whereas the rest of the scene in the chamber is that of a tableau. The witnesses think her words are meaningless, another expression of her “gibber.” The text interprets her last statement, the truest utterance of her suffering yet, using a socially conditioned response to female speech. Her words seem to mean nothing because she has ceased to be the victim and is the agent of violence; but they are also meaningless because she speaks in dialect, speaking below her social class and below the class of her witnesses. The complete break with her previous mode of speaking, according to Alexander Welsh, “contrast[s] … with everything she
has said before ... She has never before exhibited the least tendency to speak in dialect, not has she ever uttered the least irony or resentment”\textsuperscript{119} As Welsh points out, Scott takes Lucy’s utterance straight from the source, but in doing so provides yet another version of history: “Like the teller of a dialect joke … he keeps the dialect out of hearing until the last dramatic moment. All of the impertinence that poor Lucy Ashton can muster has to be compressed in a single line. The descent in style signifies her madness, but her madness cannot conceal—indeed, it reveals—her protest.”\textsuperscript{120} The belated discovery of Lucy’s genuine desires has the force of a comic punch line, but with tragic weight. Lucy goes mad because she realizes that nothing she does or says will allow others to understand her suffering.

The text provides further evidence of the differentiation of gendered speech when Bucklaw recovers. As the only survivor, other characters expect him to explain what happened but he refuses, preferring to remain silent about that night. He demands that no one speak to him about it by issuing an ultimatum: “If a lady shall question me henceforth upon the incidents of that unhappy night, I shall remain silent, and in the future consider her as one who has shown herself desirous to break off her friendship with me; in a word, I will never speak to her again. But if a gentleman shall ask me the same question, I shall regard the incivility as equivalent to an invitation to meet him in the Duke’s Walk, and I expect that he will rule himself accordingly” (p. 339). Bucklaw lets his acquaintances know that he will respond with different reactions for either male or female questioners because he cannot offer his sword as a violent punishment to a woman. He offers a woman silence, or as he puts it, an unwillingness to continue his friendship,

\textsuperscript{120} Welsh, pp. 189–90.
instead, as a socially acceptable way to repay their inquiry. With his double response, the novel equates silence as the feminine equivalent of the sword.

Bucklaw’s unwillingness to discuss the details of the wedding night afterward inadvertently sheds light on Lucy’s turn to violence. The ease with which Lucy slips from silence, an acceptable female protest into force emphasizes the fragile boundary between physicality and aurality. Lucy’s repressed speech eventually overwhelms her faculties, and in the process of releasing her bind from society’s compulsion to marry Bucklaw, she also unsexes herself. Lucy’s seemingly irrational behavior signals a shift toward masculine agency that is in line with Miranda Burgess’s description of the change in Scott’s interpretation of the sentimental novel: “Scott’s early reading of political historiography bound romance to an ideology placing women in symbolically crucial roles, so that the genre remained stubbornly dependent on an impossibly naturalized and generalized version of femininity and feminine desire.”

His resistance to the conventions of the romance further illuminates the way the sentimental genre represented and indeed enacted gendered ideologies.

Although Lucy’s silence fails to give her agency to choose Ravenswood over Bucklaw, it does allow her to express her desires. The opening chapter helps to demonstrate the capacity for the historical novel to show the effects of silence. In framing the story as a cautionary tale, Scott writes toward an elusive conclusion, but one that contains the possibility of a progressive ending in its use of experimental language. In contrast to the formulaic unfolding of events in the romance, history could be unbound from any obligation to a false or distorted version of reality and allowed to develop as an inevitable series of events within which individual narratives could be traced. Lucy’s unwillingness to accept her fate demonstrates the fragility of human desires.

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against the fabric of history. Scott’s development of the romance into the historical novel shifted these valences so that the particular genres were not tied to gendered identities. The next chapter investigates how Frances Burney experiments with using historical settings to tell a domestic story of female ingenuity. The heroine of her last novel, *The Wanderer* (1814) attempts to change her past by remaining silent, only to find that late-eighteenth century social conventions rigidly prevent her entrance. Like her heroine, Burney overcame the negative associations with women writers to have a successful career, suggesting a move away from silence as the domestic novel increasingly favored conviviality and communication.
CHAPTER THREE

The Wanderer and Frances Burney’s “Speaking Machines”

Frances Burney’s novels seemingly have little in common with Ann Radcliffe or Walter Scott’s fictions set in distant times and lands, but like Radcliffe and Scott, Burney’s novels couple psychological realism with temporal and geographic specificity to comment on the foibles of high society. Her keen ear for dialogue allows her to document her heroines’ travels from their domestic homestead to the city with a fine degree of detail. The late eighteenth century’s social transformations are captured through humorous examples of nobles behaving badly, absentminded mothers, and heroines who are misunderstood as often as they communicate clearly. By the time she published her last novel, The Wanderer; or Female Difficulties (1814), however, the upper-class world she had charted in her first three novels had irrevocably changed as a result of the French Revolution.\(^{122}\) Burney, who married the French exile Alexandre d’Arblay in 1793, lived in France during the Napoleonic wars where she composed much of The Wanderer. Like Evelina (1778), Cecilia (1782), and Camilla (1796), The Wanderer chronicles a young woman’s entrance into upper-class British society, and the travels and travails that happen when the excesses and ridiculousness of the bon ton threaten her reputation and social status.\(^{123}\)

Unlike the heroines of Burney’s first three novels, Ellis/Juliet moves anonymously through

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\(^{122}\) Frances Burney, The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties, ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack, and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991). Subsequent references to The Wanderer will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

British society, relying on her talents and education instead of her family, social, or national connections.

The novel’s protagonist, an unknown French emigrée, assumes the moniker “Ellis” when her English acquaintances mishear her query for a letter marked “L.S.” Readers learn her real name, Juliet, midway through the novel, when she encounters a childhood friend. Burney scholarship is divided on whether to refer to her by Ellis or Juliet, but my argument maintains the distinction between her actual identity and how others address her. By referring to her as “Ellis/Juliet” throughout this chapter, I take my cue from Claudia Johnson, who uses both names to preserve the distinction between her assumed identity and recovery of her real name.124

At the start of the novel, Ellis/Juliet joins a group of English passengers, led by Elinor Joddrel and Albert Harleigh, leaving France “During the dire reign of the terrific Robespierre” (p. 11). Her troubles mount when she loses her purse soon after landing, but as she faces the prospect of having to return to France, Elinor and Harleigh encourage her to join them. Although she insists upon paying for herself, Ellis/Juliet lacks a way to gain easy money without revealing her identity, so she capitalizes on what advantages she does possess, namely, her beauty and intellect, by entering the service economy through employment as a harp instructor, seamstress, and humble companion to various women in Elinor’s social circle. She befriends the charming Lady Aurora, but other women regard her with suspicion because she maintains silence regarding her real identity. Her growing feelings for Harleigh, whom Elinor also loves, as well as her need to be economically self-sufficient complicate her movements within upper-class English society, since many characters will not associate with her except as an employee.

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Critics such as Margaret Anne Doody, Deidre Shauna Lynch, and Andrea K. Henderson have examined how Burney’s heroines habitually exhibit strong self-censorship, born out of a desire to follow the dictates of proper behavior.125 “Burney’s heroines,” according to Julia Epstein, “prefer to remain silent. For Burney, the female voice speaks only when spoken to, its words always defensive, challenged, and challenging.”126 I build on these arguments by situating Burney’s last novel within the emergence of the domestic novel. *The Wanderer* imperfectly critiques the social practices that control female speech by examining how that rhetoric is applied across class boundaries. Ellis/Juliet exhibits noble qualities but cannot participate fully in the British leisure class because she lacks money and an identity. As a result, her silence defies the sentimental novel’s compulsion to speech, as noted by Suzie Asha Park who writes that “the wanderer’s reserve … questions and challenges the very pressure to disclose depths that an increasingly Romantic culture both exerts and manages to veil as a gentle invitation to express the self freely.”127 Unlike Park, I read Ellis/Juliet’s silence as part of a larger framework wherein the domestic novel resists the sentimental novel’s confessional moment by situating the novel’s stylistic failures within a larger publishing climate that denigrated women writers.

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125 In her introduction to *The Wanderer*, Doody astutely notes that the initials that form Ellis’s name, “L.S.” are “the first letters of the sequence L.s.d.—livre, shilling, denarius—pounds, shillings, and pence. They represent a currency. To be a woman and to come upon the economic world, the world of exchange, is to realize that one is seen as a medium and means of exchange. Women do not command a currency—they are a currency” (p. xvi). See also Andrea K. Henderson, *Romanticism and the Painful Pleasures of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 63–124; and Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 164–206.


This chapter examines the conditions of *The Wanderer’s* publication, the production and reproduction of certain elements of the sentimental novel, and the way the novel structures female relationships in order to determine why female characters choose to speak or remain silent.  

Women are figured as both consumers and producers of speech, and their position within an economy based on language is largely determined by their social status. The concern with naming and what to “call” Ellis/Juliet even as she refuses to speak about her past reinforces her namelessness. Ellis/Juliet marvels at the way she is treated at the hands of the “generous” noblewomen who become her benefactors, making her silence an important part of Burney’s social critique while raising the stakes of her lack of identity.

The conflict between speech and silence in *The Wanderer* is in many ways an extension and culmination of Burney’s decades-long interest in female expression. Burney dedicates *The Wanderer* to her ailing father, Dr. Charles Burney, who died only two weeks after the novel was published, noting that the “grateful delight” she feels at presenting her “latest attempt” to him differs markedly from her initial apprehension to “inscribe to my much-loved Father the first public effort of my pen.”

Although Burney alludes to her blockbuster first novel, *Evelina* (1778), that established her literary celebrity, the dedication resurrects memories of her...
unpublished novel, *The History of Caroline Evelyn* (likely written 1766–67)\(^{130}\), which a young Burney burned out of embarrassment and a desire to please Dr. Burney. Burney began writing at an early age, but keenly felt the stigma that was attached to novels:

> So early was I impressed myself with ideas that fastened degradation to this class of composition [the novel], that at the age of adolescence, I struggled against the propensity which, even in childhood, even from the moment I could hold a pen, had impelled me into its toils; and on my fifteenth birth-day, I made so resolute a conquest over an inclination at which I blushed, and that I had always kept secret, that I committed to the flames whatever, up to that moment, I had committed to paper. And so enormous was the pile, that I thought it prudent to consume it in the garden. You, dear Sir, knew nothing of its extinction, for you had never known its existence. Our darling Susanna, to whom alone I had ever ventured to read its contents, alone witnessed the conflagration; and—well I remember!—wept, with tender partiality, over the imaginary ashes of Caroline Evelyn, the mother of *Evelina*.\(^{131}\)

Burney’s emotional account recalls her attempt to overcome her “secret” passion for writing that led to her disposal of her materials before they became public knowledge. The passage offers competing framing narratives for the bonfire. Burney likens her love for writing to an illicit affair, noting that she “blushed” when she considered her “toils” and that her decision to burn her

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\(^{130}\) For more on the dating of this manuscript, no copy of which survives, see Claire Harman, *Fanny Burney: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), p. 45.  
papers was a “conquest” over material that she “had always kept secret.” At the same time, Burney mourns the loss of her work like the death of a loved one, describing how her sister, Susanna, with whom Burney shared her stories, “wept with tender partiality, over the imaginary ashes of Caroline Evelyn.” *Evelina*, an epistolary coming of age story, contains little of Caroline Evelyn’s melancholic history, but the incident cast a long shadow over Burney’s early literary efforts.

Burney’s extensive journals further explore her attempts to overcome her natural disposition toward reticence as a female novelist.132 Burney frequently writes about the difficulty women faced they attempted to articulate their identity. Like Ellis/Juliet, who exhibits severe anxiety when asked what her name is—“I cannot tell my name!”—so too do Burney’s journals reveal the tension between being a woman and being able to articulate oneself as a woman (p. 33). Burney begins her journal on March 27, 1768 with an address “To Nobody”: “To Nobody, then, will I write my Journal! since To Nobody can I be wholly unreserved—to Nobody can I reveal every thought, every wish of my Heart, with the most unlimited confidence, the most unremitting sincerity to the end of my Life!”133 Burney addresses her journal to someone who does not exist and attests to the constraining influences she felt applied to female speech. Though she genders her “Nobody” as female, she feels frustrated she must do so: “but why, permit me to ask, must a female be made Nobody? Ah! my dear, what were this world good for, were Nobody a female?”134 Burney, like her characters, finds herself in a double bind; unable to speak, and unable to name to whom she could speak, she confronts “namelessness,” which Joanne Cutting-

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Gray argues is the “silent condition of individual women.”\textsuperscript{135} Burney’s overwhelming desire to write overcame the self-imposed constraints that initially checked her ambition. Her journals chronicle anecdotes from her social circle and contain much of the same wit that readers savored in her later novels.

Burney’s writings were driven by what Epstein calls an “uncontrollable imaginative necessity,” yet her creative output slowed during her residence in France, further heightening the public’s anticipation for her last novel.\textsuperscript{136} Burney moved to France in 1802 when her husband, French lieutenant-general Alexandre d’Arblay, was offered a position in Napoleon’s government. Travel restrictions during the Napoleonic wars prevented her from returning to England for the next decade. The Wanderer appeared eighteen years after Camilla, but when finally published, Burney was disappointed with the public’s reaction. The novel was initially a financial success; the first edition rapidly sold out, and a second edition was issued. In a letter to Charles Burney, Frances Burney writes with excitement, “Martin hies to me from Longman’s this morning, with the incredible tidings—That the whole edition—of 3000 copies—is already all gone!”\textsuperscript{137} The initial burst of enthusiasm quickly waned, as William St. Clair notes in his history of the Romantic reading public: “Longman agreed to pay £1,500 for a first edition of 3,000, plus another £1,500 for five subsequent editions totaling £3,000 for 8,000 copies in all.” By the summer of 1814, only 461 copies had been sold of the second edition, and “In 1817, Longman ‘wasted’ the remainder of the second edition and the whole of the third and fourth

\textsuperscript{135} Joanne Cutting-Gray, Woman as ‘Nobody’ and the Novels of Fanny Burney (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1992), p. 84.
\textsuperscript{136} Epstein, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{137} April 2, 1814, in Burney, Journals and Letters, pp. 473 and 473n6.
editions, 3,000 copies in all. The book was not reprinted until 1988.”

Like her younger self writing “to Nobody,” without an audience, *The Wanderer’s* lack of critical success forced Burney to confront her latent anxieties about writing that had been subdued by the achievements of her first three novels.

Unlike the privacy of her journals, Burney had a large audience when *The Wanderer* appeared, but found that readers were uninterested in the novel’s characters or story. William Hazlitt’s negative review “Standard Novels and Romances,” which appeared in the February 1815 edition of the *Edinburgh Review*, criticized Burney’s “Female difficulties” as “difficulties created out of nothing.” After praising the originality of Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605–15) and Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749), Hazlitt unfavorably critiques the shallowness of Burney’s characters in *The Wanderer*, arguing that “She has formed herself an abstract idea of perfection in common behavior, which is quite romantic and impracticable as any other idea of the sort.” Burney implicates a range of social injustices in Ellis/Juliet’s struggles, but her careful attention to manners and mannerisms, Hazlitt argued, weakened her plot.

Burney’s frustration over the reception of *The Wanderer* resembles the distresses of the novel’s heroine. In a letter to her brother, James, on July 10, 1815, Burney laments her novel’s failure to meet the expectations of her reading public: “And Here, Expectation was founded upon Impossibilities, or Improprieties: half the Public expected, from my long residence in France, Political anecdotes, or opinions, and the other half expected, from the title of the Work and my

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own unsettled life, The History of the Author.” The timing of The Wanderer’s delayed publication along with Burney’s literary popularity created anticipation for its release, but what emerges in the novel is not an historical account of Burney’s time in France, but rather her observations of the social changes that occurred during the last decade of the eighteenth century. As a 1790s novel published after its time, The Wanderer has more in common with other historical fiction such as Walter Scott’s novel Waverley (1814) than Helen Maria Williams’s travelogue Letters from France (1794).

As the novel begins, a group of English refugees flees Revolutionary France when a mysterious young woman joins them at the last minute: “During the dire reign of the terrific Robespierre, and in the dead of night, braving the cold, the darkness and the damps of December, some English passengers, in a small vessel, were preparing to glide silently from the coast of France, when a voice of keen distress resounded from the shore, imploring, in the French language, pity and admission” (p. 11). The opening sentence produces a disorienting effect as it situates the novel in the historical past while creating a panoramic, theatrical setting that ends in a cry for help. “The voice of keen distress” begins the novel’s emphasis on speaking and the desire to be heard. Burney peppers her speech with exclamation points and interjections: “O” and “Oh” invoke her energy and the urgency of her request while emphasizing the uneasiness of the passengers and tension between their security and that of the yet-unnamed woman (p. 11).

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Situated against the French soil from which they flee, the English passengers are “complacent, politically obtuse, and xenophobic,” according to Margaret Anne Doody, and exhibit nationalistic prejudices even “while thinking that they have happily avoided history.” The woman could not be more different from the people she addresses: she is French, the boat English; she is dressed in rags and has a dingy visage, compared with the pale-faced and upper class people on the boat; and she wants to be heard at a moment when the people in the boat want silence.

The opening sets the tone for further exchanges between people of unequal rank within the novel, as social preferences and obligations undermine sympathetic gestures. Her female voice rather than her race or nationality marks her in need of protection. None of the passengers recognize the woman, and the debate on whether to rescue her divides the passengers along gendered lines. One of the sea officers argues that they should let her on the boat simply because she is a woman: “‘Nay, since she is but a woman, and in distress, save her, pilot, in God’s name! … A woman, a child, and a fallen enemy, are three persons that every true Briton should scorn to misuse’” (p. 12). By grouping women with other subjects of pity, the sea officer takes power away from the nameless speaker only to deposit it with “true Briton[s].” The call to arms appeals to their national pride and self-perception as noble and generous. The male passengers absorb the Incognita’s cries for help into a chivalric system they imagine themselves

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144 Doody, pp. 313–68, 326.
145 Karen O’Brien examines how women emerged as a distinct social, cultural, and historical category against the backdrop of the Enlightenment’s discovery that “there is such a thing as society, that humans are principally intelligible as social beings, and that society itself is subject to change” (Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009], p. 1).
146 David Hume’s Treatise of Human Nature identities women and children as objects of compassion. See my discussion of Hume in the introduction, pp. 9–11.
possessing, causing them to take responsibility for and ultimately neutralize and regulate her speech.

Once she steps on the boat, Ellis/Juliet ceases to speak, refusing to reveal additional details about herself or her destination, and instead communicates her thoughts and feelings using the sighs and blushes that are part of the sentimental novel’s repertoire. Though the reader learns about her bit by bit, the characters are continuously frustrated by her anonymity and silence. Any sympathy felt for the woman’s distress becomes part of a larger historical and political discourse, as Ellis/Juliet’s sentimental displays of feeling, so heavily emphasized throughout the novel, allow her to be a potentially unifying figure for different social groups.

The narrator does not initially identify any of the English passengers in the boat or the anonymous female voice, but personalities become distinguishable by the type of language they

147 According to David Simpson, political speech was marked by an intense censorship: “Pitt’s Gagging Acts of 1795 against certain kinds of public speech made a ‘strange and extreme silentness’ seem a necessary tactic for those at odds with government. Strange, because unnatural, even as associated with the silence of the strange; extreme, because more than just silent—a secret or yet more silent silence, which earns the unusual word silentness” (Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger [Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2013], pp. 64–5). Simpson’s argument raises the intriguing possibility that things could be made known through the very fact that nobody could speak about them. See also John Bugg, Five Long Winters: The Trials of British Romanticism (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2014), pp. 109–136.

148 Ellis/Juliet’s request for asylum calls to mind the many threatened female figures of the French Revolution; her cries echo Edmund Burke cries in favor of Marie Antoinette: “I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult.—But the age of chivalry is gone.—That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever.” (Reflections on the Revolution in France, ed. L. G. Mitchell [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993], p. 76). Without her speech to mark her identity, the text draws attention to her dark skin and introduces a French, foreign body to the text, as Sara Salih notes: the Wanderer’s skin “acts as something of a red herring, drawing the reader’s attention away from Juliet’s Frenchness, which is smuggled into the text in much the same was as she herself is smuggled into England, ‘under cover of darkness.’” (“‘Her Blacks, Her Whites and Her Double Face!’: Altering Alterity in The Wanderer,” Eighteenth-Century Fiction 11, 3 (April 1999): 301–15, 309); See also Helen Thompson, “How the Wanderer Works: Reading Burney and Bourdieau” ELH 68, 4 [Winter 2001]: 965–989, 970); and G. Gabrielle Starr, “Burney, Ovid, and the Value of the Beautiful,” Eighteenth-Century Fiction 24, 1 (Fall 2011): 77–104.
use. The English passengers express curiosity as to the young woman’s identity and are fascinated when she finally speaks in tones that indicate that she is of noble birth with an educated background. When confronted about her identity, Ellis/Juliet remains secretive though her body betrays her emotions and reveals what she cannot say: “A crimson of the deepest hue forced its way through her dark complexion: her very eyes reddened with blushes, as she faintly answered, ‘I cannot tell my name!’” (p. 33). Trembling with modesty, Ellis/Juliet’s embarrassment not only evokes characteristics of the sentimental heroine, but also reveals that her “dark complexion” is only a mask. As the Incognita’s blackface wears away and the novel establishes that she is white, accomplished, and beautiful, discussion of her facial features more or less disappears, only reappearing to reassure the reader that she is very attractive.

In the absence of a name, the passengers augment the exoticness of her mysterious past by calling her “stranger” and “Incognita,” names that dissolve her association with a particular territory while simultaneously making her a desirable figure even though she initially lacks a claim to the passengers’ assistance beyond her calls for help.149 These dual identities—Incognita and stranger—are later shed when they reach England and she asks for a letter for “L.S.,” which the passengers mishear as “Ellis.” The reader learns that the woman’s real name is Juliet midway through the novel, but the other characters do not learn her true identity until the denouement.

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149The name “Incognita” has a long history in the eighteenth century as a female figure of silence and secrecy, though it may not be as familiar as these other Romantic monikers. The main character of Eliza Haywood’s *Fantomina* tricks her lover and eventually disguises herself as an Incognita to win his affections; furthermore, Incognita was the name given to a piece of undiscovered land, linking female anonymity to geographic exploration (Haywood, *Fantomina*, ed. Alexander Pettit, Margaret Case Croskery, and Anna C. Patchias [1725; Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004]). The Wandering Jew also frequently appeared in Gothic novels, most notably in Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (ed. Douglas Grant [1820; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989]).
Yet as a woman, Ellis/Juliet only gains autonomy once she is absorbed in a wealthy, aristocratic family, which gives her a title and liberates her from her status as “nobody.”

**WHAT’S IN A NAME?**

Without money or a benefactor, Ellis/Juliet remains nameless to everyone she encounters. While she has been refined by education, she lacks personal connections and struggles for visibility in a social order in transition. Julia Epstein argues that “Juliet’s nameless and stateless situation permits her to belong to no class and to all classes simultaneously and to pass easily from one to another,” but her refusal to submit to society’s expectations isolates and alienates her from the very people who wish to assist her.\(^\text{150}\) As a novel set in the past featuring a heroine who seemingly has no past, *The Wanderer* undermines the capacity for a shared history and social order to establish stable and meaningful connections between individuals. Ellis/Juliet’s social anxiety stems from her inability to tell anyone her real name, which becomes the primary problem she must negotiate in the novel. This is a symptom of Burney’s heroines’ inability to testify to their identity, according to Cutting-Gray: “What Burney’s other heroines … do not say, in the sense of reveal, is not merely a lack of speech; they often appear as silent victims because they are denied the legitimacy of name and the authority to name.”\(^\text{151}\) Since Burney’s novels operate within rigid economic systems, her heroines’ movement tends to be limited within their social milieu; actions that occur outside their class sphere are treated as taboo and with an unnamable horror.

\(^{150}\) Epstein, p. 182.
\(^{151}\) Cutting-Gray, p. 84.
Ellis/Juliet differs from Burney’s earlier heroines because her anonymity resists classification. In this vacuum, other characters invent identities for her and navigate the issue of her namelessness in varying ways. Some, such as the young Mr. Ireton, are bewitched by her beauty and find the mystery of her identity appealing; others, such as Lady Aurora, want to know her name to cement a lasting friendship. Most find the mystery provoking, and very few appreciate Ellis/Juliet’s true motivation: to preserve her honesty and happiness. Rare is the response that encourages her to maintain her silence, like the one given by the Admiral when Ellis/Juliet claims that “frankly explaining my situation” would “betray me to insupportable wretchedness”: “‘Why then, if that’s the case, you are very right to hold your tongue. If the law never makes a person condemn himself, much less ought a little civility. There are dangers enough in the world without running risks out of mere compliment.’” (p. 36). This legalistic reasoning, to remain silent to prevent self-incrimination, is one that Ellis/Juliet values but that the novel exposes as mere fantasy when deployed in social situations.

Even though other characters settle on giving her the name “Ellis,” they do not address her in the same manner, differentiating her alias based on sex, class, and even talent. Lord Melburry and Lady Aurora, both members of the aristocracy, call her “Miss Ellis.” Elinor, the brash and outspoken woman who serves as Ellis/Juliet’s foil, desexes her and calls her just “Ellis” without title or salutation; similarly, the narrator calls her Ellis as if that is her first name. Finally, the Miss Crawleys, who are her pupils when Ellis/Juliet becomes a music tutor, call her THE Ellis, as if “Ellis” is an artistic marker, thus associating Ellis/Juliet with uniqueness and originality while also objectifying her (pp. 152 and 270). Each of these monikers satisfies the speakers to a certain extent, as very few ask her to confirm or deny her identity. The exception is the irritating and exhausting Mrs. Ireton, who demands to know Ellis/Juliet’s true name, upon
which, she freezes: “Colouring and stammering, Juliet answered … that she was called Miss Ellis. ‘Called?’ repeated Mrs. Ireton; ‘what do you mean by called?—who calls you?—What are you called for?—Why do you wait to be called?—And where are you called from?’” (p. 480).

Ellis/Juliet sidesteps Mrs. Ireton’s initial question by providing a pseudonym as an answer to what she is “called,” not what she is “named.” Mrs. Ireton seizes on the word “call” and demands that Ellis/Juliet identify herself. The slippage prompted by the word “call” underscores the fragile relationship between speaking and identity. Ellis/Juliet can only identify herself through speaking, but because her speech is marked by extreme discretion, she also refuses to give specific details. Mrs. Ireton’s insisting questions regarding how Ellis/Juliet should be “called” reinforces Ellis/Juliet’s vulnerability to the whims of the upper-class women who employ her and foreshadows her eventual servitude in Mrs. Ireton’s household.

As an outsider, Ellis/Juliet fails to connect with the other women as peers. Instead, she acts as their tutor, ladies companion, or object of charity. The women initially stage benefit concerts on her behalf and use their influence to create opportunities for employment (however limited the success of these endeavors) to generate income, but her activities do not permit her to assimilate into the group as an equal. Through her employment, she suffers the embarrassment of being at the beck and “call” of their whims and desires, and as a result, they treat her less kindly and more like another servant or pet. Furthermore, her refusal to disclose details about her past creates additional barriers to her entrance into English society. The mystery of her origin quickly tires them, and her refusal to speak about practically anything limits her value in the marketplace of ideas. Although male characters eagerly seek out her conversation, women reject her presence and express distrust and frustration about her refusal to speak about her past.
The difference in reactions by the sexes may be based on the allure of mystery that Ellis/Juliet creates; as one male character states, “‘[Ellis] sings and plays like twenty angels, and that all the women are jealous of her, and won’t suffer a word to be said to her’” (p. 444). Yet the various occasions in which female characters ignore Ellis/Juliet cannot be accounted for by mere jealousy; women also refuse to admit her into their conversation because she has nothing to offer in the exchange because she chooses to remain silent. Even when she struggles to participate, other women thwart her attempts by shunning her:

As she approached the door, every voice seemed employed in eager talk; and, as she opened it, she observed earnest separate parties formed around the room; but the moment that she appeared, every one broke off abruptly from what he or she was saying, and a completely dead silence ensued. Surprised by so sudden a pause, she seated herself on the first chair that was vacant, while she looked around her, to see whom she could most readily join. Mrs. Howel and Mrs. Maple had been, evidently, in the closest discourse, but now both fixed their eyes upon the ground, as if agreeing, at once, to say no more. (p. 125)

Much in this scene is expressed without the use of dialogue. The ladies’ disdain, Ellis/Juliet’s embarrassment and later rehabilitation are described solely through descriptions of movement, as the ladies cross from one side to another, turn their backs on her, and form even smaller cliques, all without meeting the gaze of the other women or speaking. Ellis/Juliet looks around the room to see with whom she can converse, but the ladies’ eyes will not meet her own. Even those
women to whom she has spoken in the past now ignore her, unwilling and unable due to social pressure to acknowledge her presence.

Since the other women will not speak to her first, she cannot enter their social circles, dramatized in this scene as the women close ranks physically to exclude her. The only woman who is willing to break the hierarchy and invite Ellis/Juliet into the inner circle is Lady Aurora, who crosses the room to speak to her (pp. 126–7). Once Lady Aurora admits Ellis/Juliet to the group, the embarrassment shifts from Ellis/Juliet to the group of women. As the wealthiest and most generous of the ladies present, Lady Aurora also needs the least from Ellis/Juliet. She can speak to her freely precisely because she requires nothing in return. Yet Ellis/Juliet finds it difficult to speak in her presence because she is in awe:

> With difficulty Juliet now forbore casting herself at the feet of Lady Aurora, the hem of whose garment she would have kissed with extacy, had not her own pecuniary distresses, and the rank of her young friend, made her recoil from what might have the semblance of flattery. She attempted not to speak; conscious of the inadequacy of all that she could utter for expressing what she felt, she left to the silent eloquence of her streaming, yet transport-glittering eyes, the happy task of demonstrating her gratitude and delight. (p. 553)

Ellis/Juliet’s effusive but awkward behavior toward Lady Aurora indicates that their relationship is still unequal, with their friendship at times taking the form of sisterly devotion and sympathetic charity. While Ellis/Juliet carefully observes class boundaries as she is sensitive that her expressions of feeling may take on the “semblance of flattery,” nevertheless her gratitude for
Lady Aurora’s benevolence frequently exceeds the boundaries of propriety, such as when Ellis/Juliet “sobbed with unutterable delight; while tears of rapture rolled down her glowing cheeks, and while her eyes were lustrous with a radiance of felicity that no tears could dim” (p. 554). Ellis/Juliet expresses her emotions in the one way she knows how—through bodily gestures—but the propulsive quality of her “streaming, yet transport-glittering eyes” opens up space to read this as an instance of what Lisa L. Moore calls “romantic friendship.” Claudia Johnson similarly reads this as an opportunity created by sentimentality: “It is impossible to read these, or any descriptions of Lady Aurora’s and Ellis/Juliet’s relationship without confronting the ecstatically homoerotic space opened out by warps in sentimental ideology itself.” Even as Ellis/Juliet struggles to retain her propriety, her emotions inevitably risk spilling over and creating opportunities for immodest behavior that resemble Elinor’s bouts of impropriety. While the novel eventually redeems and recuperates her sentiments, since Lady Aurora is actually her half-sister, her inability to communicate what truly ails her reveals the fragility of female conversation as a means to find common ground. Instead, their relationship demonstrates how speech is used to leverage one’s social position, and that true feminine delicacy would be better expressed with silence, as Ellis/Juliet learns when she uses reticence to her advantage.

THE END OF “FEMININE DELICACIES”

While Elinor and Ellis/Juliet each purport to favor reason over sentimentality, they disagree on the best way to express themselves. As Ellis/Juliet attempts to guard her reputation,

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Elinor’s overly impassioned speech threatens to undermine her unwavering silence. Like the figure of the female philosopher, a stock character found in Jacobin and anti-Jacobin novels of the 1790s, Elinor claims values truth and sincerity over artificiality, but her unrequited passion for Harleigh often conflicts with her ideology. Her romantic feeling suggests an appeal to feminine delicacies but she carries her passion to an immodest extreme that becomes representative of a range of social conduct that finds familiar expression in the “Rights of Women.” Yet The Wanderer differs from previous satirical depictions of the woman of sympathy in that Burney writes openly of the female difficulties that are the “motto” of the novel. What emerges when Elinor and Ellis/Juliet debate the value of “feminine delicacies” is not a didactic model of proper behavior, but instead the limitations all women faced.

Neither Elinor nor Ellis/Juliet fully understands the others’ social situation, and they critique what they see as character flaws in the other. Ellis/Juliet’s personal history requires secrecy, and she chastises Elinor for her immoderate behavior and extravagant speech: “Ah, why, to intellects so strong, a heart so liberal, a temper so gay, is there not joined a better portion of judgment, a larger one of diffidence, a sense of feminine propriety, and a mind rectified by religion,—not abandoned, uncontrolled, to imagination?” (p. 401). Though she admires Elinor’s exaggerated and comedic actions paint her as a “Woman of Feeling”; similar models can be found in novels by other writers who mocked the Rights of Woman, such as Elizabeth Hamilton in her caricature, Bridgetina Botherim, Memoirs of Modern Philosophers (1800) (ed. Claire Grogan [Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000]). Elinor carries the sympathetic resonances of Mary Wollstonecraft’s Mary (1788) or Mary Hays’s Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796). See Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, Mary, Maria, and Matilda, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Penguin, 1993); and Hays, Memoirs of Emma Courtney, ed. Marilyn L. Brooks (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000). Like the sentimental women in these novels, Johnson argues that Ellis/Juliet’s ability to “disclos[e] somatically and with perfect clarity what she (unlike Elinor, the feminist) is too virtuous ever to declare openly: her blighted love for Harleigh” “unsexes her” and “[deprives] us of any basis from which to generalize about her suffering” (p. 173)

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“intellects,” “heart,” and “temper,” she cannot condone her opinions because her speech verges on the unfeminine. Elinor, for her part, criticizes Ellis/Juliet for her unwillingness to resist the restrictions placed upon her: “‘You, Ellis, and such as you, who act always by rule, who never utter a word of which you have not weighed the consequence; never indulge a wish of which you have not canvassed the effects! who listen to no generous feeling; who shrink from every liberal impulse; who know nothing of nature, and care for nothing but opinion—you, and such as you, tame animals of custom, wearied and wearying plodders on of beaten tracks, may conclude me a mere vapouring imposter, and believe it as safe to brave as to despise me!’” (pp. 585–6).

According to Elinor, Ellis/Juliet’s censure of her behavior is a form of self-preservation. To “act always by rule” is to weigh each utterance against the “consequence” of that speech, and by discounting Elinor’s actions as that of a mere “imposter,” Ellis/Juliet follows society’s expectations for women but loses her connection with “nature.”

Elinor, frustrated by the limitations placed on her by society, claims that “Woman, whom they estimate thus below, they elevate above themselves,” adding, “She must be mistress of her passions; she must never listen to her inclinations; she must not take a step of which the purport is not visible; she must not pursue a measure of which she cannot publish the motive; she must always be guided by reason, though they deny her understanding!—Frankness, the noblest of our qualities, is her disgrace;—sympathy, the most exquisite of our feelings, is her bane!” (pp. 399–400). Echoing motifs espoused by Mary Wollstonecraft, Elinor points out the hypocrisy of society’s views of women. She justifies her declaration of love for Harleigh with sentiments that echo Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792): “Rights … which all you sex, with all its arbitrary assumption of superiority, can never disprove, for they are the Rights of human nature; to which the two sexes equally and unalienably belong” (p. 175). Elinor’s
behavior challenges the assumption that women should only utter what they have carefully weighed against the balance of reason and imagination. While Ellis/Juliet guards her words in order to keep her identity hidden, Elinor, “by whom secrecy or discretion were as carelessly set aside, as by herself they were fearfully practiced,” thinks nothing of sharing them (p. 54). For Elinor, speaking is naturally a voluntary expression of personal or individual desires, but her words nevertheless suggest that speaking is an act of will. Elinor declares herself to be free from feminine constraints, but her vivaciousness undermines her efforts to rid herself of social conventions. Her carelessness, though improper for a woman of her position, is a result of her privileged status. Her jokes and dramatic sensibility appear as a defense mechanism to guard against disapproval, but her frequent silences and blushes indicate that she cannot completely overcome society’s class-based expectations of her. Her inconstant speech frequently belies her actions and she often falls victim to the ideological forces she claims to reject.

Though she wishes to break free from the conventions of her sex, her expressions and gestures betray her true feelings and wavering uncertainty of her actions, causing her to become silent much like Ellis/Juliet. As a character whose passions define her, her silence arises from an abundance of feeling and signals a reflection of her conduct, often a regretful response after extremes of passion. When Ellis/Juliet rebukes her, Elinor disavows her remarks and replies, “You must never mind what I say, nor what I do; for I sport all sort of things, and in all sort of manners. But it is merely to keep off stagnation: I dread nothing like a lethargy” (p. 71). She claims that her outbursts are simply a manifestation of her boredom, but it soon becomes clear

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156 In Burney’s novels, the conflict between rational and emotional behavior represents, in Kristina Straub’s words, the “contradiction between the two opposing ideological impulses of Burney’s duplicitous desires—to be human and a woman” (Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy [Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1987], p. 5).
that she sincerely desires to be liberated from society’s constraints, if only so that she can freely pursue Harleigh.

Strangely, Ellis/Juliet’s outsider status allows Elinor to trust her to assess Harleigh’s feelings for her. After her first encounter with Harleigh, Ellis/Juliet notices Elinor watching them jealously: “Elinor was all eye, all scrutiny, but all silence” (p. 120). Almost as quickly as she establishes Ellis/Juliet as her love rival, Elinor takes her into her confidence by sharing her passion for Harleigh and her family’s displeasure at her actions. She recruits an unwilling Ellis/Juliet as her accomplice, and begs to know if she has heard anything of Harleigh’s affections: “Speak! Say Yes, or No, at once! Give me no phrase—Let me see no hesitation!—Kill me, or restore me to life!—Has Harleigh—” she gasped for breathe—“ever made you any declaration?” (p. 151). Not content with her responses, Elinor continues to ask questions, becoming “nearly out of breath” with talking (p. 153). Elinor’s question, spoken with agitation, permits all possibilities to exist at once and demonstrates her optimism and despair. The dialogue is broken with em-dashes that indicate that her gasping speech does not allow for any moments of silence and at the same time fill the page with gaps that represent a textual emptiness. Her exhortation to Ellis/Juliet—“Speak!”—appears as a mirror image to Ellis/Juliet’s request at the beginning of the novel to “Hear me!” Yet since Elinor does not pause long enough for Ellis/Juliet to answer, she excludes her from either speaking or being heard, a conversational difficulty Ellis/Juliet faces throughout her interactions with Elinor’s social circle.

Ellis/Juliet can only answer by using her silence to convey Harleigh’s refusal, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of non-response over exaggerated speech and reinforcing silent expression as a feminine form of communication. When Elinor’s true feelings emerge, she “stopt, and the deepest vermilion overspread her face … female consciousness and native shame
took their placed; and abashed, and unable to meet the eyes of Ellis, she ran out of the room” (pp. 154–5). Her embarrassment, indicated by the change in hue on her cheek, is short lived, but poignant. She leaves the room, only to return again momentarily. Elinor, though she all-too-consciously wants to inhabit these doctrines, remains conscious of proper female behavior and retreats when her philosophy goes too far. Her outburst, shame, and recovery imply the failure of her speech and her wavering philosophical belief. She acts against her pronouncement that such an answer would “kill” her by attempting to stoically regain her composure, but the incident is only the first indication of Elinor’s instability. She continues to pursue Harleigh by asserting her own claim to his affections and challenging his political beliefs.

Elinor’s earlier declaration to “Kill me, or restore me to life!” represents a figurative expression of her love for Harleigh that she later enacts during a hyperbolic public suicide attempt. She disguises herself as a deaf and dumb foreign man prior to attending a benefit performance, much like how she met Ellis/Juliet at the beginning of the novel—both are foreign, both silent, and both anonymous. Ellis/Juliet becomes increasingly anxious about the man, and faints. As she recovers, Elinor reveals her disguise: “The large wrapping coat, the half mask, the slouched hat, and embroidered waistcoat, had rapidly been thrown aside, and Elinor appeared in deep mourning; her long hair, wholly unornamented, hanging loosely down her shoulders. Her complexion was wan, her eyes fierce rather than bright, and her air was wild and menacing” (p. 359). With the affectation of a mad woman, Elinor produces a dagger and stabs herself.\footnote{The publication of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s “The Sorrows of Young Werther” (1774) sparked a rise in the suicide rate as readers sought to replicate Werther’s fate (The Sorrows of Werter: A German Story, 2 vol. [London: J. Dodsley, 1779]). Another suicidal figure, Mr. Harrel in Burney’s Cecilia, kills himself because he could not pay his extensive gambling debts. Elinor’s failed suicide in The Wanderer represents a satirical version of the inflamed passions and overwrought language found in sentimental novels, but her recovery and religious affirmation favors more reasonable dialogue than that found in Werther’s imitators.}
novel stages two opportunities for Elinor’s suicide. Ellis/Juliet first imagines that the man in disguise is Elinor, there to commit suicide, and faints; when she recovers, she realizes that her fear is, in fact, coming true, and faints again: “An horrible surmise occurred, that it was Elinor disguised, and Elinor come to perpetuate the bloody deed of suicide. Agonized with terror at the idea, she would have uttered a cry; but, shaken and dismayed, her voice refused to obey her; her eyes became dim; her tottering feet would no longer support her; her complexion wore the pallid hue of death, and she sunk motionless on the floor” (pp. 358–9). While imagining Elinor’s suicide, Ellis/Juliet becomes paralyzed and cannot speak. The idea of suicide is enough to make Juliet faint, thereby creating a theatrical performance of death. This moment illustrates what David Simpson terms, “Substitutability,” which he argues “is stronger and less negotiable than sympathy … It is based on a simpler and much more threatening equivalence: it says that each of us could be in the place of the other without doing anything at all to assist in the exchange. It generates not so much a human bond as a state of panic, because identity itself becomes impersonal and subject only to the laws of exchange.”

Elinor’s attempts to reform Ellis/Juliet’s conservatism backfire when she recoils from Elinor’s extreme actions. Ellis/Juliet’s fainting spell and subsequent “death” permits her to replace Elinor in this scene, but even though she can sympathize with another woman’s position, she is more vulnerable than Elinor due to her unstable social position. Unlike Elinor, who connects her decision to commit suicide with her ability to speak (“I come to die: I bleed to die; and now, even now, I talk to die!” [p. 361]), the experience robs Ellis/Juliet of her voice. While Ellis/Juliet can substitute for Elinor, she cannot

\[158\] Simpson, *Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), p. 61. Simpson draws upon Karl Marx’s concept that the common worker is essentially reproducible and replaceable because he or she is merely mechanical labor and the means of production in a factory setting, an idea that will be further discussed in the next section.
complete the exchange because she is caught between the twin impulses to follow society’s customs regarding female speech and her instinct for self-preservation.

Elinor’s failure to kill herself mirrors Ellis/Juliet’s fainting spell in that her recovery is a performance. Elinor prefers the idea of death rather than the real event, though she resents that her doctor and visitors try to hasten her recovery: “‘Why do you not speak? … Away with this burlesque dumb shew! … No more of these farcical forms!’” (p. 377). Burney satirizes Elinor’s illness by drawing parallels between her situation and that of a sentimental heroine, but her madness signals her inability to fully embody this ideal without surrendering her rationality to her emotions. Elinor’s excessive emotions represent the slippery slope by which sentimentality could cause hysteria and eventually madness. As Simpson argues, “Elinor’s … self-deceptions are presented as the symptoms of a real disorder and not just a lifestyle derived from novels.”

In the context of proper female behavior, Elinor appears to be mad because she behaves immoderately, but during her recovery she wavers between silence and excessive sentimentality. Elinor’s suicide attempt and the mirror image of Ellis/Juliet’s fainting spell signals the tension in the eighteenth-century between the mind and the body. According to Elinor, the mind and body are connected and cannot be severed: “‘Reason, philosophy, analogy, all prove our materialism. Even common observation, even daily experience, in viewing our natural end, where neither sickness nor accident impede, nor shorten its progress, prove it by superannuation; shew clearly that mind and body, when they die the long death of nature, gradually decline together’” (p. 784).

The unspoken conclusion is that the mind is similarly gendered alongside the body. Elinor’s failure to escape her bodily influence (i.e., when her cheeks blush even while she denounces feminine delicacy) signals the conflicting aspects of her philosophy. Under this construction,

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Ellis/Juliet’s fainting spells represent a proper (and feminine) response, while Elinor’s suicide attempt represents an overly sentimental emotional response. As Harleigh presents religious objections to her fatalist philosophy, Elinor pales when confronted with the real effects of suicide. The ease with which she surrenders her position suggests that Elinor is not fully committed to the ideals she espouses, but actually performs them as an opportunity to rebel against her privileged situation. Her effusiveness, though improper for a woman of her position, nevertheless is possible because her societal position is secure.

IDLE WORDS, IDLE SILENCES

In The Wanderer, conversation represents an economy that uses words as currency, and Ellis/Juliet is initially as impoverished with her speech as she is with money. She struggles to support herself by giving music lessons, performing in benefit concerts, and doing needlework. In an act of charity, Elinor provides her with an introduction to the appropriately named Mrs. Ireton. Ellis/Juliet agrees to become Mrs. Ireton’s companion, charged with entertaining and accompanying her everywhere; now, instead of being excluded, Ellis/Juliet must be included in every social activity. Mrs. Ireton accepts her as her companion, but she does not want just any attendant. She hires Ellis/Juliet because the young woman has demonstrated herself to be a proper lady, sensitive to social conventions. After establishing Mrs. Ireton as an antagonist, Burney wastes no time unveiling the cruelty of her household. Ellis/Juliet alludes to Jane Collier’s satirical guidebook, An Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting (1753), and calls
Mrs. Ireton Megara (p. 486). Mrs. Ireton proves to be an insufferable employer: “If a new novel excited interest, or a political pamphlet awakened curiosity, she was called upon to read whole hours, nay, whole days, without intermission; even a near extinction of voice did not authorize so great a liberty as that of requesting a few minutes for rest” (p. 492). Even as she has Ellis/Juliet read aloud endlessly, Mrs. Ireton laments the decline of the art of conversation: “How unfortunate it is to have such nerves, such sensations, when one lives with such mere speaking machines!” (p. 481). By turning people into “speaking machines” who talk but to no purpose, Mrs. Ireton reduces Ellis/Juliet to her function as a secretary. Jon Mee argues that conversation operated as “a species of ‘small change,’ circulating around the everyday world of the tea table, but the currency of such domestic virtue was increasingly, if variously, regarded as a public benefit.” Mrs. Ireton inadvertently criticizes the employer-employee relationship she establishes with Ellis/Juliet when she likens a woman who speaks to a mechanical worker; both are automatons that are committed to reproducing the conditions of exchange. Mrs. Ireton claims that Ellis/Juliet is not economically valued because she produces something that should be a public good, of use to everybody, but is trying to monetize it for her private gain.

160 See Jane Collier, An Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting, ed. Katharine A. Craik (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006). The introduction to the second edition teasingly mocks Collier’s fellow authors: “The simple precept she was taught by her parents, that ‘when she had nothing to say, she should say nothing,’ is so deeply impressed on her mind, that she has ever endeavored to make it the rule of her conversation: And how many trifling performances would this rule prevent from appearing in public, did authors likewise remember, that when they had nothing to write, they modestly should write nothing” (p. 3). The art of domestic economy began with guidebooks such as the ones Collier’s book satirizes, but the conduct book as a genre grew well into the nineteenth century, as chapter four will discuss.

161 Jon Mee, Conversable Words: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762–1830 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 11. See also Andrea Henderson, who writes: “This novel, which is explicitly concerned with social and economic change, dramatizes the development and uses of the commodity fetish in the early nineteenth century” (“Burney’s The Wanderer and Early-Nineteenth-Century Commodity Fetishism,” Nineteenth-Century Literature 57, 1 [June 2002]: 1–30, 2).
Ellis/Juliet’s coercion to speak mechanically causes her to continue speaking without the “liberty of a few minutes for rest.” Her entire intellectual capacity is consumed with reading others’ words out loud. Marx’s laborer is connected to his work by the machine: “in machinery the motion and the activity of the instrument of labour asserts its independence vis-à-vis the worker. The instrument of labour now becomes an industrial form of perpetual motion.”\(^{162}\)

Similarly, Ellis/Juliet becomes a machine through the ceaseless repetition of the same activity, and the value she represents is not tied to her own person, but rather the product that she creates, in this case, entertainment for Mrs. Ireton. Marx notes, however, that workers are limited by the amount of energy they can exhaust before needing to rest, and Ellis/Juliet eventually runs out of speech.\(^{163}\) When given the opportunity to assert her independence, she at first finds herself unable to articulate her own desires. She has been reduced to the materials she consumes and her machinery can only produce what others have already written. Denied original thought and expression, she forgets how to speak even when she is given the opportunity. Moreover, her status as an independent person is limited by her work as a machine; she no longer has an identity outside of her work.

Ellis/Juliet’s exhaustion manifests as silence, but Mrs. Ireton, who becomes angry when she ventures to express her dissatisfaction, interprets this as a demonstration of her capacity to speak or not at will. When Ellis/Juliet suggests that she might not prefer to work for Mrs. Ireton, she cries: “‘I perceive I was mistaken! I perceive I knew nothing of the matter! It only means a fine lady! A lady that’s so delicate it fatigues her to walk down stairs; a lady who is so independent, that she retires to her room at her pleasure; a lady who disdains to speak but when


\(^{163}\) See Marx, p. 548.
she is disposed, for her own satisfaction, to talk” (p. 488). Mrs. Ireton’s sarcastic tone implies that Ellis/Juliet desires an outcome that is not consistent with her intellectual output. Deidre Lynch argues that *The Wanderer* demonstrates “a certain self-consciousness about the social exchanges and the communicative mechanisms that underwrite the value and intelligibility of the ‘work’ of literature: the work, that is, of animating characters and demonstrating that the self may be redeemed from social constraints and appear as it ‘really’ is.”164 Ellis/Juliet can express herself through her thoughts and feelings even if she cannot speak of them. Her departure from Mrs. Ireton’s household suggests the redeeming value of her reticence while revealing the class structures at work in her employment. Though she lacks money, her accomplishments suggest a fine education available only to privileged women. Ellis/Juliet’s reluctance to become a mere “speaking machine” stems from her resistance to sink to a lower class.

The episode with Mrs. Ireton reveals the class structures at work in *The Wanderer*. The conflict between Ellis/Juliet’s and Mrs. Ireton derives from their similar social position. Though Ellis/Juliet lacks money, her accomplishments suggest a fine education available only to privileged women. Ellis/Juliet’s talents remain obscured when she interacts with upper-class women only to be revealed when she speaks with rural characters. A conversation with Mr. Gooch, a “hale, hearty, cherry-cheeked dapper farmer,” suggests that the differences in language between classes can make speech illegible to both sides. Mr. Gooch complains about the unintelligibility of young women:

> ‘Why a could n’t make out their gibberish, I warrant me! For ‘t be such queer stuff that they do talk, all o’un, that there’s no getting at what they’d be at; unless

one larns to speak after the same guise, like to our boarding-school misses. I’ve seen one or two o’un myself, that passed here about; but their manner o’ talk was so out of the way, I could no’ make out a word they did say. T’might all be Dutch for me. And I found ‘em vast ignorant. They knew no more than my horse when land ought for to be manured, from when it ought for to lie fallow. I did ask un a many questions; but a could no’ answer me, for to be understood. (p. 467)

Mr. Gooch likens the young ladies’ speech to a foreign language, claiming, “T’might all be Dutch for me.” He complains about not only the “manner” of talking but also the content; the young women are ignorant of farming techniques, and even though Mr. Gooch prompts them with questions, the ladies “could no’ answer [him].” Yet his speech is equally unintelligible to the young ladies, a fact Burney signals by using dialect and misplaced prepositions to demonstrate the contrast between speaking and comprehension across classes.165 Mr. Gooch’s inability to communicate with the ladies suggests that class stratification does not produce easily surmountable boundaries. Ellis/Juliet also cannot understand him, however, and this failure leads to additional confusion and further embarrassment when Mr. Gooch advises Ellis/Juliet to pay off her debts as soon as possible, not understanding that her educated mannerisms hide her lack of financial resources.

Once she exhausts all means of employment in the city, Ellis/Juliet turns to the countryside, which she anticipates will be a nostalgic return to simplicity: “to lodge with a rustic family of this simple description, in so retired and remote a spot, promising all the security and

165 Burney uses dialect infrequently in her novels. The most notable instance appears in *Camilla* when the eponymous heroine attends an amateur performance of *Othello* and Burney rewrites Shakespeare’s lines to reflect the actors’ regional differences (*Camilla*, pp. 317–24).
privacy that she required, with fine air, pleasant country, and worthy hosts” (p. 659). When she arrives by stagecoach, however, she finds that her presence is not as welcome as she assumed it would be. The pastoral illusion is shattered when she realizes that no one will give her lodgings without a reference, and “by the meaner and poorer sort of people, her carrying her parcel herself, leveled her, instantly, to their own rank; while her demand of assistance, her loneliness and even her loveliness, sunk her far beneath it, in their opinion” (p. 656). Juliet also notices the social discord between herself and the working class. When she encounters two young children playing, she cannot understand what they say: “To Juliet scarcely a word of their narrations was intelligible; but, to the ears of their mother, accustomed to their dialect, their lisping and their imperfect speech, these prattling details were as potent in eloquence, as the most polished orations of Cicero or Demosthenes, are to those of the classical scholar” (p. 658). Whereas Ellis/Juliet had previously distanced herself from people due to her refusal to speak, here she is excluded because she cannot understand the children’s speech. The children do not speak plainly, but their mother believes their words are “polished oration.” The analogy of the children’s speech to classical figures gestures toward the difference in education between Ellis/Juliet and the peasants, and her lack of social connections that would justify her elegant manners.

Ellis/Juliet’s commitment to keeping her past a secret threatens to undermine her efforts to find sympathy and safety in the country much like it did in London. When she appeals to the generosity of an old farmer and his wife, she requests to speak to them in private because she feels embarrassed by the details of her travels. To her disappointment, the farmer does not rest long enough to listen:
Juliet could by no means consent to publish so dark and uncertain a history to so many hearers; she again, therefore, entreated to address him in private. He had come home, he answered, only to take a mug of beer; for the plough was in the field: however, she might call again, if she would, at dinner-time; but he had no time to give to talk in a morning. And forth he went, whistling, and hallooing after his labourers, as he jogged his way. She then applied to his bustling, sturdy wife; but with no better success; Who was to feed the poultry? Who was to give the wash to the pigs? Who was to churn the butter? If she threw away her time by gossipping in the morning? (p. 691)

Ellis/Juliet’s entreaties signal an unexpected divide between public and private spaces. Unwilling to “publish” her narrative, she wishes to “address [the farmer] in private,” suggesting her awareness of female delicacy as well as her ignorance of working-class people when both the farmer and his wife claim they have “no time to give to talk.” Despite Ellis/Juliet’s continued protests, the peasant woman “bustled away to look after her evening’s milking; roughly refusing to hearken to any sort of explanation from Juliet, and saying that she never knew any good come of listening to talking; which was no better than idling away time” (p. 702). The woman refuses to speak not out of a sense of feminine decorum, but because she does not have the luxury to gossip. Ellis/Juliet’s sojourn to the farm acts as an inverse to her employment by Mrs. Ireton. Her appeal in this case for protection and charity subverts the “classic sentimental tableau”; while Ellis/Juliet is educated and wears fine clothes, she lacks money: “money which the spectator
generally has, and which the object of his or her gaze does not.” The farmer and his wife do not care about Juliet’s story because they are more concerned with the quotidian details of their work. Burney’s use of the word “labourers” reflects the temporal distance between *The Wanderer*’s historical setting and the date of its publication. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, it became increasingly difficult to imagine the type of eighteenth-century pastoral simplicity Burney wants to invoke due to Britain’s rapid industrialization. The farmer and his wife value work, believing that idle people are wasteful, but cannot overcome their class-based prejudices to provide Ellis/Juliet with shelter or employment. Ellis/Juliet “sees herself as a moving cog in political economy’s social machine,” as Lynch writes, her position unstable and dependent her relationship with other people. Unlike Mrs. Ireton, who has the means to turn Ellis/Juliet into a “speaking machine,” the marketplace of words has no place in the country. Ellis/Juliet attempts to make herself visible through her speech since it is the only form of currency she possesses, but the peasants remain unable to give her what she really needs—someone to listen.

Ellis/Juliet’s struggles eventually come to an end when she discovers the truth of her origins and her real name. When a man claiming to be Ellis/Juliet’s husband, Harleigh asks for confirmation of her marriage, she cannot speak: “not a syllable was uttered! A look, however, escaped her, expressive of a soul in torture” (p. 729). The would-be husband takes her to an inn, where she learns that she was born from a secret marriage between Lord Granville and her mother, who died when she was in infancy. Unfortunately, Lord Granville, as a member of the landed aristocracy, did not inform his family of his marriage, and upon his death, left no record

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167 Lynch, p. 204.
of her birth. She discovers that Lady Aurora is her half-sister, and decides “if to communicate the circumstances which had brought her into this deplorable situation, could shew her sense of the benevolence … she would set apart her repugnance, and gather courage to retrace the cruel scenes” that brought her to England (p. 738). Though her admittance into the Granville family does not rely on her narrative, she chooses to explain herself because she is grateful for their previous kind treatment. By breaking her silence, Ellis/Juliet demonstrates her innate nobility and “courage.”

Her friends recall that while on the boat to England, she threw something into the English Channel, which she explains was a wedding ring. Her wedding ceremony, though, retains much of the silence expressed by Ellis/Juliet throughout the rest of the novel. When a commissioner sent by Robespierre arrests her childhood guardian, the Bishop, he finds a promissory note stating that Ellis/Juliet is worth six thousand pounds. He decides to marry her, and when she resists, states that “Her priest … should away to the guillotine; though she had only to marry, and sign the promissory-note for the dower, to set the parson at liberty” (p. 740). Unlike her entrepreneurial efforts in England, in which she traded her intellect and talents for money, here the commissioner is solely interested in possessing her body so that he can take her dowry. Half-conscious, half-fainting throughout the entire performance, Ellis/Juliet claims she was aware of very little during the ceremony:

‘The civil ceremony, dreadful! However little awful compared with that of the church, was instantly begun; in the midst of the buss of business, the clamour of many tongues, the sneers of contempt, with the laughter of derision; with an irreverence that might have suited a theatre, and with a mockery of which the
grossest buffoons would have been ashamed. Scared and disordered, I understood not,—I heard not a word; and my parched lips, and burning mouth, could not attempt any articulation. In a minute or two, this pretended formality was interrupted, by information that a new messenger from the Convention demanded immediate admittance. The commissary swore furiously that he should wait till the six thousand pounds were secured; and vociferously ordered that the ceremony should be hurried on. He was obeyed! And though my quivering lips were never opened to pronounce an assenting syllable, the ceremony, the direful ceremony, was finished, and I was called,—Oh heaven and earth!—his wife! His married wife!—’ (p. 745)

Ellis/Juliet’s participation in the ceremony is negligible, since she faints during the ceremony and never utters “an assenting syllable,” yet becomes “his married wife” all the same. She takes care to say that she was “called” his wife, much as she tells Mrs. Ireton previously that she is “called” Ellis. Speech gives authority to actions that signal a change of state (from a single woman to a wife, for example). Ellis/Juliet’s silence during the ceremony does not prohibit the actions from occurring, because she is married without her consent. Silence can be read as a neutral, or negative force in this instance. The novel’s interpretation of the events runs counter to J. L. Austin’s criteria for a performative utterance in which words themselves have agency and value; in a marriage vow, a couple is legally married only when each says, “I do.”168 After the ceremony, Ellis/Juliet refuses to speak about her origins, which leads to a recuperation of silence as a source of power since she reasserts her inner worth. The pivotal scene in which she reveals

her past represents Burney’s attempt to overcome the sentimental novel’s repression of speech by reaffirming silence as a site for positive determination. Ellis/Juliet’s reward for maintaining her self-preservation by keeping silence is the revelation that her “husband” died before the events in the novel began. The novel’s overdetermination of her innocence weakens the expected conclusion, since Ellis/Juliet has already proved her self-worth without receiving external rewards. Once it is determined that Ellis/Juliet is single, she can be reinstated into her rightful family and can marry Harleigh.

Although this happy (and predictable) conclusion adheres to the conventions of the domestic novel, Ellis/Juliet’s punishment and reward are due to her silence. She is forced into marriage despite her inability to recite her vows, and she regains her family because she continued to act like a proper woman even through her suffering. By turning her into an aristocratic descendant, the novel forecloses the possibility that she could represent “everywoman,” favoring the “Nobody” of Burney’s early journals. She is pulled out of her condition through happenstance, rather than her own ingenuity. In spite of the seemingly optimistic ending, Burney concludes the novel with a note of caution:

Here, and thus felicitously, ended, with the acknowledgement of her name, and her family, the DIFFICULTIES of the WANDERER;—a being who had been cast upon herself; a female Robinson Crusoe, as unaided and unprotected, though in the midst of the world, as that imaginary hero in his uninhabited island; and reduced either to sink, through inanition, to nonentity, or to be rescued from famine and death by such resources as she could find, independently, in herself (p. 873).
Burney recounts the strengths of her heroine and reminds her readers of the dangers, no less real than those faced by Daniel Defoe’s hero, that could have befallen Ellis/Juliet if she had lacked the ingenuity to survive.\(^{169}\) Though her comparison to Robinson Crusoe emphasizes Ellis/Juliet’s individuality and strength, the novel can only end happily once she receives a “name” and a “family.” While Burney purports to favor merit over innate value in the novel’s moral (“Yet even DIFFICULTIES such as these are not insurmountable, where mental courage, operating through patience, prudence, and principle … keep the untamed spirits superior to failure, and ever alive to hope” [p. 873]), her conservatism complicates the role of female speech. Ellis/Juliet’s continued reticence and failure to speak on her own behalf suggest that Burney was more wary of the dangers of female silence than her ending implies. Ellis/Juliet’s “female difficulties” are an ironic acknowledgement that she was rescued from her anonymity through silence. Despite Ellis/Juliet’s efforts to create a path for herself as a “nobody,” her successes and disappointments are defined by her social value as a silent, “nameless” woman. If the novel stages the path of a female Robinson Crusoe, the figure more likely to fit this label would be Elinor, who also tries to maintain her individuality but ultimately fails because she cannot convert her speech into meaningful action. She does not accomplish her goal of winning Harleigh’s affection, and ultimately surrenders her claim to Ellis/Juliet while serving as a warning to women who ignore the rules guarding appropriate behavior. By calling attention to the literary antecedents of *The Wanderer*, Burney reveals that writing, and by extension speaking, provides a way to overcome the feeling of isolation that resulted from the geographic, historical, and temporal divisions within British society. *The Wanderer* suggests that social unification has a tenuous and fragile

connection to language, and that silence may not be an effective strategy for women even if it is advanced as an appropriate means of female expression.
CHAPTER FOUR

Revising Sympathetic Silence in Jane Austen’s Domestic Fiction

Jane Austen’s female characters such as Fanny Price seemingly obey strict social codes that dictate how and when women should talk, but even *Mansfield Park* (1814), Austen’s quietest novel, demonstrates resistance to the notion that women should be seen and not heard. Crawford tries to gain Fanny’s affections by criticizing the clergy, but does not speak for long before he interrupts himself: “‘Did you speak?’ stepping eagerly to Fanny, and addressing her in a softened voice; and upon her saying, ‘No,’ he added, ‘Are you sure you did not speak? I saw your lips move. I fancied you might be going to tell me I *ought* to be more attentive, and not *allow* my thoughts to wander. Are not you going to tell me so?’”¹⁷⁰ Fanny repeats that she has not said anything, but Crawford assumes that his self-censorship would provide an opportunity for her to reproach his conduct, as he knows she has a religious turn of mind. Crawford exhibits a depth of understanding about conduct heretofore unexpressed, but his question suggests that Fanny’s potential interruption would reveal her inclination for him. At the same time, however, he demonstrates his own inappropriateness as a romantic suitor since his reform is halting and incomplete. While Fanny feels that Crawford behaves badly, she does not correct him because it is not her place to do so.

Published the same year as Walter Scott’s *Waverley* and Frances Burney’s *The Wanderer*, *Mansfield Park* alludes to the outer world without seeming to take place in it. Although readers have often criticized Fanny for failing to voice her own desires, she both

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exemplifies and resists the passivity advocated by conduct books. Austen’s heroines’ resistance to social propriety reveals that their future happiness depends on what they say or hide. Instances in which characters talk too much or out of turn, or conversely remain silent or unresponsive, create misunderstandings that undermine the relationships between people and inhibit the networks that form the domestic novel. Deirdre Lynch argues that in order for Austen’s plots to advance, characters must continually give voice to their desires to “keep[] the lines of communication open and the wheels of conversation turning.”\textsuperscript{171} Similarly, Jon Mee argues that Austen’s novels delight in “the pervasive relish for conversation, [] its sparkle and fluidity, [] its ability to create relations between people, [and] the possibility of creating community out of dispersal,” but conversation exacerbates those ruptures by drawing attention to the uncertainties contained within ambiguous communication.\textsuperscript{172} Certainly Austen’s novels are full of chatty characters, and her facility with witty dialogue is partly why her novels enjoy an enduring popularity with readers. Yet this reading does not fully account for the frequent moments of reticence, elision, and avoidance that give her stories their dramatic tension.

Austen’s novels intersperse dialogue with silent, reflexive pauses. The dexterity of her prose leads D. A. Miller to connect her style to her novels’ sense of realism: “its author hates style, or at any rate, must always say she does; she must always profess the values, and uphold the norms, of ‘nature,’ even as she practices the most extraordinary formal art the novel had yet known.”\textsuperscript{173} Austen weaves a complex realist fabric by developing free indirect discourse, a technique wherein the narrator articulates a character’s inner thoughts, allowing her reader to feel empathy for the characters without sacrificing the integrity of the dialogue. Although free

\textsuperscript{172} Mee, p. 206. 
indirect discourse is not strictly a form of textual silence, its emphasis on a character’s internal development helps to uncover the motivations that may lead female characters to remain silent. Free indirect discourse can generate measurable absences within dialogues that in turn pinpoint gender differences in language. Female characters observe and keep undisclosed information secret, but free indirect discourse ensures that these secrets are not concealed from the reader.

Critics such as Daniel Gunn, Inger Sigrun Thomsen, and Tony Tanner have demonstrated how free indirect discourse allows Austen to realistically portray her characters’ interiority by showing that spoken language does not always align with one’s thoughts.174 “Free indirect style,” according to Anne-Lise François, “records experiences no less realized or complete for not concretizing themselves out loud in addressed verbal expression; the ‘failure’ of such moments to result in spoken communication need not, although it may, signify their elision, undervaluing, or mystification.”175 Conversation in Austen appears artless, but her use of dialogue is heavily mediated by self-conscious, and silent, observations. Her narrator captures the social paranoia that accompanies such scrutiny, especially since it occurs “at ostentatiously close quarters,” Miller astutely notes. Austen’s development and use of free indirect discourse allows her to better map her characters’ private inner thoughts without relying on an outside person. As a result, conversations are sprinkled with omissions (or silences) of information to which the reader, but not another character, is privy, creating narrative tensions.

Characters may speak, but not necessarily to each other and not always out loud. Much of the conversational noisiness we remember from Austen’s novels is actually the result of her use of free indirect discourse that expands the novel’s capacity to include both individual and social interactions by representing the interiorities of multiple people at once. In comparison to the eighteenth century epistolary novel, in which one person at a time relates events, Austen articulates individual opinions, thoughts, and feelings of many characters simultaneously. Free indirect discourse offers a compelling example of Austen’s empathy for her characters in a way that previous eighteenth-century novels were not able to achieve.

Austen breaks free of the traditional conventions of romance by creating opportunities to subvert the assumptions of conduct literature when her heroines are presented with contradictory advice, forcing them to make decisions that are grounded in experience and reason rather than convention. Patricia Michaelson in her study of speech in the long eighteenth century argues the sexes were increasingly marked by particular modes of conversation: at the end of the long eighteenth century, “women were becoming classed as a unified sociolinguistic category, increasingly differentiated from men.”176 Novelists explored these differences with specific attention to the gaps or silences that occur in conversation. For Austen, according to Janis P. Stout, novelistic reticence provides the reader with an interactive text in order to facilitate engagement between the story and the reader. Stout reads textual silences as opportunities to learn more about characters interior states: “Austen uses omissions, understatements, and silences mainly for analysis, to isolate and clarify meanings without spreading them boldly before the reader in so many words. She also uses such devices as means of engaging the

responsive reader, that is, of stimulating an interactive reading.”

Rather than obfuscating the narrative or plot, free indirect discourse reveals details in ways that plain diction could not. Stout goes on to explain how this relates to sexual politics between men and women: “Austen’s silences become windows through which the clear-eyed reader sees the falsity and the unfairness of a system of misconceived and misapplied conventions regarding gender.” Stout does not articulate who or what is silent; rather, reticence “undercut[s] the relative positions of the sexes.” Instead of allowing her readers to passively accept gendered approaches to education and language, Austen encourages them to reassess the textual assumptions of the sentimental novel.

This chapter traces the process of sympathetic education that occurs when conversational mishaps destabilize the community that speech is meant to uphold. In Austen’s novels, misunderstandings typically happen when characters speak more than is deemed proper, or if they fail to respond to what others say. Her characters learn to pay attention to the silences or gaps in conversations rather than relying on their own self-absorbed interpretations, which in turn demonstrates the importance of listening within conversation. Her novels explore the space between speech and silence as they relate to individual interiority and conceptions of the self in order to interrogate the relationship between the individual and society. If we consider that

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178 Stout, p. 21.

179 Edward Said’s influential postcolonial analysis of the silences within *Mansfield Park* has been answered with further work on the absences found within Austen’s novels (*Culture and Imperialism* [New York: Vintage, 1994], pp. 80–96). Eric Lindstrom, for instance, notes that J. L. Austin’s formulation of the performative aspects of speech and his accompanying illustration of the marriage act corresponds neatly with Austen’s narratives (“Austen and Austin,” *ERR* 22, 4
silence can represent the negation of speech, then we can examine how the absence of speech creates moments of narrative tension within Austen’s novels. My readings of *Mansfield Park*, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and *Sanditon* (1817) will incorporate the full range of conversational etiquette delineated by Austen’s narratological style with a particular focus on gendered constructions of language. Before discussing how silence functions in Austen’s œuvre, I will first examine how the eighteenth-century conduct book established the values of silence and chattiness in female conversation to show how Austen first incorporates and then revises proper behavior as a marker of an individual’s worth.

**CONDUCT LITERATURE AND GOSSIP**

The contrast between how women were supposed to behave and the reality of social discourse suggests that the anxiety over female speech is not limited to the domestic or even the sentimental novel, but in fact becomes part of the fabric that undergirds our understanding Romantic period fiction. Austen’s characters seem hyper-aware of their speech because they know that it can designate class and even gender boundaries. Austen’s mindful use of dialogue can be traced to the model set by the eighteenth-century conduct book. As discussed in my introduction, Samuel Richardson applied the moral lessons of the conduct book in *Clarissa* (1748) to show how heroines could deploy the advice taught in conduct books to measure her actions against the expectations of society, however, female writers faced a double-standard. If their heroines showed too much decorum, they were seen as placed under too much narrative pressure, and if too outspoken, they represented the novel’s moral degeneration. Austen

negotiates the gendered bias against women by using similar social situations that might be found in conduct books, but for an original purpose. While conduct books suggest that young women should be demure in their speech, Austen’s novels promote active truthful language over taciturn responses, yet Austen refuses to submit her characters to moralistic and didactic lessons. While her plots acknowledge the differences in education between men and women (Tom Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, for example, is absent for most of the novel because he is schooled in London and attends the Antiguan estate with his father, while Fanny and his sisters stay behind), pedagogical instruction takes a back seat to her interest in courtship and love. Nevertheless, her novels bear the mark of the proliferation of conduct books in the eighteenth century in the way that her female characters jealously monitor the speech against their actions. Austen’s female characters (with the exception, perhaps, of Emma) are taught accomplishments such as dancing and music to attract a husband, but this system simultaneously rewards and punishes them for trying to conform to the ideal laid out by conduct books.

Though we can locate the origins of the conduct book in antiquity, conduct literature gradually became organized as a genre in the seventeenth century. The number of conduct books proliferated in the eighteenth century, leading to what some scholars have identified as a “crisis” in manners. Conduct books were written for men and women, unmarried and married people, servants, children, and parents, thereby producing guidelines of proper behavior for people of all walks of life. Some conduct books appeared as a set of letters, and others were comprised of a

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181 Many conduct books from the period were focused on how women should behave and talk, but comparatively little attention was paid toward male conversation. There were conduct books written for men in the eighteenth century, such as Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield’s *Letters to His Son*, 2 vol. (London: J. Dodsley, 1773) and John Aikin’s *Letters from a Father to His Son on Various Topics Relative to Literature and the Conduct of Life*, 3d edn. (London: J.
series of didactic essays; both formats were intended to model good and bad behavior for the reader. Writers of conduct literature sought to teach readers how to be better members of society by improving their relationships within their social circle. In *Letters on Female Education* (1777), the author, Mrs. H. Cartwright, says, “After their duty towards God, their duty towards their neighbor is the next lesson a child should be taught.”¹⁸² This emphasis on fraternity and familial relationships within society formed the basis for much of the advice given in these texts.

Young ladies in particular were encouraged to learn how to speak with delicacy and grace. John Bennett’s *Letters to a Young Lady, on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects Calculated to Improve the Heart, to Form the Manners, and Enlighten the Understanding* (1789) advocates structured encounters governed by a mutual understanding of proper speech to expedite the “improvement” of young women: “Conversation with people of genius and sentiment is the easiest and quickest way to improvement. It gives us all its graces, without its austerities; its depth, without its wrinkles. We soon grow languid and gloomy with abstracted studies, weary of ourselves, and sated with our pursuits.”¹⁸³ According to Bennett, conversation is a form of continuous education; left alone, one would “soon grow languid and gloomy,” but an emphasis on sociability helps to maintain one’s mental health. Bennett’s advice resembles that of David Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) in that Bennett similarly advocates for a sympathetic connection to others to guard against personal distress. Discourse with others becomes a way to defend against the negative affects of academic solitude. Bennett advocates in

¹⁸³ John Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady, on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects Calculated to Improve the Heart, to Form the Manners, and Enlighten the Understanding* (1789) in *Conduct Literature for Women, 1770–1830*, ed. Morris, 2:1–172, 69–70.
particular for conversation between “people of genius and sentiment,” and he warns against meaningless or frivolous discourse. In spite of this recognition of the importance of speech, Bennett notes that young ladies should refrain from participating immediately, and instead should listen to others before speaking: “There was a famous school amongst the ancients, where the pupils spent several years in learning the very necessary art of being silent. Remember, my dear girl, that nature has given you two ears, and only one tongue; and that scripture has said, ‘be swift to hear, but slow to speak.’”184 By placing the burden of observation onto women, Bennett undermines his prior appeal for sympathy, since the exchange will not be mutual, but expressive for men, while silent for women. Young ladies were expected to moderate their speech to promote a balance between conversation and silence; the challenge presented to readers is to learn when to speak and when to hold their tongue.

Many conduct books held similar views on female speech. Nancy Armstrong sees two processes at work: first, conduct books teach women how to identify social hierarchies strictly depending on writing and speech style (which blend together), and second, writing and speech between genders helps to reinscribe the difference between the two; she argues that: “the hierarchy among styles of feminine speech effaces these differences between speech and writing. The writing that is closest to speech places an author low in a hierarchy of writing, but it is precisely the kind of English modeled on speech that identifies the well-educated woman.”185 Writing and speech were loaded categories, especially within the development of the domestic novel. The guidelines for proper behavior were not uniform, and the form of some conduct books complicates their message. Conduct books modeled on epistolary exchanges sometimes called

for women to be silent even as they were represented as a series of letters exchanged between women. Joseph Towers in *Dialogues Concerning the Ladies* (1785) does not insist upon the silent, demure female figure, but instead promotes sincerity in all modes of conversation: “I think it is always right to speak what we think, and never to deviate from truth, whatever may be thought of our politeness.”\(^{186}\) Despite such encouragement to speak honestly, sentimental novels featured heroines who were more likely to remain speechless when pressed for their opinions.

Real life did not follow this strict binary. According to Amanda Vickery, women, and wives in particular, were expected to “lisp ‘I know nothing of town and its wicked ways,’” but political changes to eighteenth-century society meant that “in practice most elite, upwardly mobile men desired wives varnished with sophistication” in order to serve as ambassadors of their husband’s economic, social, and political interests. Coffee house conversations between men migrated to the tea table, and female discourse became a potent ally in the development of social practices that embodied a changing class system. As Vickery continues: “Rural innocence was all very well in a maid, but could be a handicap in the wife of a man of parts. Provincial maids were often sent to metropolitan relatives and exposed to visiting to burn off their bashfulness. A chatty bride was far more use than a wallflower. After all, one of the benefits of matrimony for men was the acquisition of a hostess to carry one’s campaigns on the domestic front.”\(^{187}\) The needs of upwardly mobile men meant that their wives needed to learn to shed their “bashfulness” and become more “chatty” in order to weave the social fabric that could create opportunities for their husbands. What can be called dance-floor diplomacy lies at the heart of the tension between actual speech patterns and that portrayed in conduct literature and

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sentimental novels alike. Though conduct manuals’ popularity meant that their ideas were widely consumed, their effectiveness as a pedagogical practice was limited by their integration with other parts of female education.\textsuperscript{188} As Pam Morris reminds us, “Conduct writing, of course, is prescriptive not descriptive; it only offers us the writer’s perception of how women should behave and what role they should occupy in society.”\textsuperscript{189} The conduct book’s tenuous link to life as it is (as opposed to life as it should be) facilitates the connection between conduct literature and the development of the novel. In one sense, conduct literature represents another form of fiction, admittedly one that was read under different circumstances than the novel, but that was nevertheless invested in an unsustainable worldview.

By the end of the eighteenth century, critics of the conduct manual asserted that it limited opportunities for women. Mary Wollstonecraft’s \textit{Vindication of the Rights of Woman} (1792) responded to educational treatises such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s \textit{Emile, ou De l’education} (1762) that advocated training girls to be helpmates of their future husbands. Wollstonecraft argues that women should look beyond their domestic duties to learn to expand their mind: “Connected with man as daughters, wives, and mothers, their moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold their own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue.”\textsuperscript{190} Though skeptical of Rousseau’s model that differentiated male and female education, Wollstonecraft

\textsuperscript{188} For more on the rise of the conduct book, see Armstrong’s analysis in \textit{Desire and Domestic Fiction}: “Educational literature that addressed a female readership quickly became very popular … and despite a falling off after the 1820s, many books remained in print well into the nineteenth century” (p. 62).
\textsuperscript{189} Morris, general introduction to \textit{Conduct Literature for Women, 1770–1830}, p. xv.
believed women should be taught according to their social role as well as encouraged to “unfold their own faculties.” Austen’s response to conduct books is not nearly as radical as that of Wollstonecraft, but her novels satirically critique their inconsistent messages. Austen’s domestic novels reframe the didactic attitudes of eighteenth century conduct book writers and reshape them into a new fiction, one that relies on these traditions to be effective, but that nevertheless subverts expectations with characters that do not easily fall into predetermined categories.

Conduct books may provide guidance as to the best way to act in an ideal world, but novels illustrate what may happen when these actions are undermined. Since her heroines operate within a world governed by strict moral codes, Austen experiments with particular conventions in order to reveal opportunities when women exert agency over their surroundings. Patricia Meyer Spacks locates this possibility with the various ways of talking in Austen’s novels, and finds that the novel’s persistent search for inner truth represents an example of the gossipy behavior that conduct books seek to prevent: “Fiction reveals more clearly what didactic texts only hint: that gossip, ‘female talk,’ provides a mode of power, of undermining public rigidities and asserting private integrity, of discovering means of agency for women, those private citizens deprived of public function.”[191] The gossip, a stock figure that gains prominence in the eighteenth century, provides an alternative knowledge base, one constituted from experience, but that admittedly relies on exclusion as well as inclusion to produce knowledge. The word “gossip” originally referred to a woman who attended or assisted with childbirth. Though not a midwife, she was usually a close confidant of the family, and by the seventeenth century, the word referred to a godmother. Since her activities generally took place inside the domestic space, “gossip” gradually evolved to mean a woman who tattles, or talks idly,

particularly about the affairs of others. Gossiping as an avenue of expression was limited almost exclusively to women, and gossips disseminate knowledge that would otherwise be discounted as being outside the status quo. For this reason, gossips are often used as comic relief within novels and are not taken seriously, even as they reveal inner truths about proper society and provide opportunities to examine the assumptions made within conduct literature.

A notable example of the gossip in Austen’s fiction is *Pride and Prejudice*’s Mrs. Bennet, whose primary motivation is to see her daughters married to respectable men. Though the novel describes Mr. Bennet as possessing an “odd mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice” the most comic moments in the novel occur when Mrs. Bennet, “a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper” (*P&P*, p. 45), speaks. Conduct literature is designed to help young girls in particular learn refinements that will help them land good husbands. Mrs. Bennet’s motivations echo that of conduct books, even if her strategies differ: “The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news” (*P&P*, p. 45). She talks about her neighbors and friends in order to gather “news” that she hopes to usefully deploy in order to secure husbands for her daughters. The novel demonstrates that women can use conversation to gain knowledge that might otherwise be withheld from them. As Nicola Parsons points out, the types of knowledge that gossips discuss are private or domestic:

Gossip enacts a complex negotiation between the public and the private, between the position of insider and that of outsider … Like the open secret, gossip

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192 Indeed, the eighteenth-century newspapers *Tatler* and *Spectator* derive their names from a similar imagined character that has access to personal knowledge. However, these are public examples that play off the types of personal communications that constituted the gossip, and the information they provide tends to be about people in the public or political sphere.
simultaneously maintains and subverts the distinction between inside and outside. Although gossip makes public what it insists is private, the information it disseminates is often in encoded form and is itself transmitted under the sign of secrecy. In fact, because gossip is self-contained—that is, it relies on the resources of the group in which it circulates—the significance is contingent and so its meanings are specific to and contained by each moment of utterance. In that sense, then, the substance of a matter that is publically spoken about still remains local and private.¹⁹³

The gossip’s interest in the personal lives of others means that the value of her knowledge rests mainly in the home rather than in the larger world or society. Yet if we consider Vickery’s claim that women’s speech, particularly that of wives, was essential to furthering men’s business interests, the boundaries between public and private blur. Gossip may be self-contained, as it is typically limited to talking about people who the participants know personally or who are closely related to those they know, but its geographical boundaries do not limit the effectiveness of that knowledge. Gossip reveals the potentially damaging effects of conversation on another’s reputation, but as an exaggerated form of language, can also serve as a satirical reflection on the harmful effects of superficial speech.

The minutes of a Gloucester Gossip Society, whose members claim to reinforce proper behavior for young people, demonstrate how gossip could usefully show the limitations of extreme politeness. This humorous account portends to be the minutes of a society of women who, growing bored with their usual gatherings, and finding that their conversations continue to

turn toward the folly of youth, decide to use their collective wisdom in order to give advice to young persons. The minutes, which exist only in manuscript, model improper behavior by meticulously and at times maliciously recording what other people say and do, and then corrects that behavior through strict moral commentary. By mocking and then copying the didactic examples of conduct literature, the minutes measure social propriety by comparing what the group sees and hears to what should happen.\(^4\) The opening page features a hand drawn tree with a shield, and claims to be “Volume 1,” though it appears that this is the only volume that was produced. It is dedicated to Revd. John Luxmoore, who was Dean of Gloucester from 1800 to 1808, and to Henry Charles Selwyn, who was also from Gloucester and was named Lieutenant-Governor of Montserrat in 1788. Such prestigious “patrons,” representing the region’s religious and political interests, indicate the supposed high-mindedness of the Gossip Society’s pursuit. Each letter of the manuscript is styled as a book chapter, with epigraphs informing the content that follows. The manuscript comprises over a year of letters and minutes, beginning in June 1803 and ending abruptly in February 1804. The president of the society and the author of the minutes goes by the name “Penelope Placid,” and describes herself as a green-spectacled woman whose “enemies have been pleased to assert that I measure four feet by four.”\(^5\) She claims that her “fondness for society, and disposition to loquacity” have gained her the reputation of a “Gossip,” and she is unpopular with her neighbors for her tendency to critique the behavior of young people. The humor of the first letter continues throughout the manuscript.

\(^4\) The Gossip Society differs from earlier satirical conduct books such as Jane Collier’s *An Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting* (1753) by claiming to be recorded from real life, but similarly shows good manners to a ridiculous artifice that hides genuine feelings.

\(^5\) Penelope Placid, *Gossip Society Manuscript, 1803–04*, MS 218 (Woodson Research Center, Rice University), p. 5.
The six members, all women, have a variety of talents, and since most, if not all, have never married, they encourage young ladies to resist marriage, especially to foolish or bad men.

The first letters set up the inner motivations that regulate the Society’s meetings: “In our first meetings we had recourse to the usual topics of discourse, and the tea table, for what society of women can hold together without that bond of union? Brought with it its usual attendant; a little scandal which we sometimes embellished with the flowers of fiction, a little politics, in which we were too superficially versed to settle with any propriety the affairs of the nation; and a great deal of little tattle, or Gossip, in which we were without doubt infinitely more at home.”

Penelope Placid acknowledges the domestic origins of her group’s meeting place, at the “tea table,” and outlines some of the topics of conversation including “a little scandal,” “politics” and “little tattle, or Gossip.” Though we will later discover that the women are remarkably well read in current cultural and scientific discourse, Penelope states with false modesty that they “were too superficially versed to settle with any propriety the affairs of the nation.” The tenor of their conversations changes gradually, and the ladies decide to form a society to gather their collective knowledge for the benefit of young persons. The women style themselves in the bluestocking tradition, in that they favor education, reason, and scientific advancement, but their insistence on domestic conversation marks a point of departure from their eighteenth century model. The Society’s goal is to ultimately undermine conventional attitudes about gossips by offering sincere, or at least well intentioned advice.

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196 Gossip Society Manuscript, pp. 11–2.
197 The bluestockings were an eighteenth-century group of intellectual women, led by Elizabeth Montagu, who contributed to advancements in the arts and sciences. For more information on how the bluestocking circle encouraged Frances Burney’s development of her play *The Witlings* (1778–79), see Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), pp. 149–50.
Penelope Placid’s letters echo that of conduct books. The minutes are cloaked in anonymity, since those who write to the society are given pseudonyms even though they allude to specific people and places. Very rarely are readers treated to news that occurs outside of this limited parameter, and in these cases the writings are framed as diary letters that recount visits to relatives. Though the advice typically has a sober moral, the humor comes through in the satirical letters she receives, often signed with descriptive monikers such as Dorothy Thoughtless, Tom Tally ho, and John Perpendick. The style of the letters often matches the person who is writing, giving the manuscript a fictional quality that undermines its purported truthfulness. The absurdity of the letters is likely a device used by Placid to demonstrate the applicability of the society’s advice to more ordinary situations. Unlike the authors of conduct books, Penelope Placid tends to favor good sense rather than blindly appropriated rules, but her minutes are not above making fun of the letter-writers. Occasionally Placid includes complaints that she is too serious, but these admonishments become opportunities for the society to flex its wit.

The minutes demonstrate the possibility to use the conduct book genre as a basis for humorous observations on the limitations of female education when women are only taught a

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198 In her historical survey of the background behind characters’ names in Austen’s novels, Janine Barchas argues, “eighteenth-century novels routinely encouraged the scrutiny of names for clues to characterization” (*Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location, and Celebrity* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012], pp. 134–5). Barchas further argues that the importance of naming in Austen’s novels extends beyond pseudonyms because Austen uses her reader’s prior knowledge of contemporary celebrity to inform her characterization: “True celebrity, as opposed to temporary notoriety or local fame, implies a far-reaching reputation, a condition that outpaces and outlasts local gossip” (p. 5). The likely goal of the Gossip Society goal is not to embarrass or exploit particular individuals, but rather to illuminate character flaws that can be found in anybody.

199 The anonymity of the writers and the style of writing mirrors twentieth-century advice columns such as Miss Manners, Dear Abby, and Ann Landers, which similarly invoke a sense of the ridiculous in order to encourage their readers to anticipate the advice that follows based on their common sense and understanding of proper behavior.
certain manner of speaking. When one letter-writer visits her aunt, “from whom I am taught to expect something, when she says good bye to this world,” she laughs at her aunt’s outmoded dress and manner of speaking. While “conversing on indifferent subjects,” the young woman notes that the “the good lady had equally betrayed her vulgarity and her ignorance,” but the exchange reveals that proper behavior varies by age, for on her arrival, the young woman makes a social gaffe when folding her aunt’s cloak: “Marcy on one! You goes the wrong way to work; to think of beginning a thing at the bottom, and letting the top drag’! She was now half angry, and turning round to my father said ‘I tells you what Sir, if your daughter dispects any thing from me she must larn to be notable!’” The aunt’s response not only demonstrates the grammar mistakes the correspondent critiques in her letters, but also reveals the sloppiness with which her niece folded her cloak. Whereas the aunt criticizes her niece’s actions, the niece disparages her aunt’s manner of speaking. The exchange suggests that there is no objective standard with which to judge proper behavior or speech. Austen’s novels similarly use the ridiculousness of social exchanges to show how female characters might resist social pressure without sacrificing their moral goodness. By removing the conduct books’ heavily worded didacticism, Austen redefines the nature of feminine behavior through witty, but instructive, dialogue. In the next section, I argue that the subversive atmosphere of *Mansfield Park* lies not with its undermining of traditional female values, but rather in its apparent affirmation of the importance of manners to society.

**SILENCE AND FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE IN MANSFIELD PARK**

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200 Gossip Society Manuscript, p. 40.
201 Gossip Society Manuscript, p. 42.
Many critics have defined Fanny’s inactivity as her failure to act in accordance with her wishes, but the reason why she gets her final reward at the novel’s conclusion is precisely because she is able to exercise complete control over her feelings by not expressing her desires. Fanny proves herself worthy of Edmund because she represents the ultimate example of female morality as taught by conduct books. George E. Haggerty notes how the novel is preoccupied with the question of “how such a character as Fanny Price, with a clear sense of values and a moral purpose, will survive both the welter of transgressive behavior around her and those feelings of her own that she dare not ever acknowledge in the climate of dispossession in which she finds herself.” The contrast between Fanny’s conduct and that of her relatives, Haggerty suggests, leads Fanny to retreat inward. Her cousins and the Crawfords represent a leisured class that easily dissolves into dissipation when given too much reign over their actions, unlike Fanny, who maintains her commitment to correct behavior by precisely not giving voice to her emotions. As Mary Poovey shows, Fanny survives, and even thrives, in Mansfield Park’s atmosphere of moral decay because she is “outwardly everything a textbook Proper Lady should

202 Mary Poovey argues that Edmund’s teachings render Fanny unable to express her desires: “because [Fanny] has taken her model of propriety not from other women or from books but from a man whose vocation incarnates absolute virtue, Fanny Price knows only one dimension of propriety. From her education by Edmund she acquires neither the superficial accomplishments her cousins perfect nor the knowledge of how to make propriety express the desires she feels” (The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen [Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984], p. 217). I would counter that Fanny displays proper deference toward her aunt and uncle right from the moment she arrives in Mansfield Park, demonstrating that her manners and internal conduct are solid from the beginning of the novel forward. Moreover, Fanny knows that she cannot express those desires because they are improper. Indeed, were she to declare her love for Edmund, the novel suggests that she would likely have fallen into ruin and abandonment like Maria and Julia.

be; she is dependent, self-effacing, and apparently free of impermissible desires.”204 Fanny achieves her influence over her cousins and the Crawfords not by critiquing their behavior outright but through silent observation and listening, and keeping her true feelings to herself. Lynch asserts that Austen “casts her protagonists as the silent and sympathetic observers of other people’s stories and the repositories of their secrets.”205 More than elsewhere in Austen’s novels, Fanny demonstrates that sympathy can function as a motivating force toward change. She listens to others, but does not directly participate in conversation.

Fanny has internalized not simply the sentimental heroine’s penchant for emotive response, but also conduct literature’s lessons on female behavior. As Amy J. Pawl notes, Fanny’s actions exemplify “the sentimental trope that the depth of a person’s emotions may be gauged by the extent of her inability to put them into words. She who feels most, speaks least. Thus Fanny’s worth, like that of other sentimental heroines, will have to be established without her being able to speak on her own behalf.”206 Pawl identifies the thread of non-communication within the novel as a passive activity and locates Fanny’s agency outside of herself; if Fanny’s emotions overwhelm her capacity to speak, others must communicate for her. Pawl suggests that her silence stems from her disappointment in other’s actions, but this reading does not account for Fanny’s remarkable ability to resist what she sees as the corrupting influences of society by not speaking. Though her cousin Edmund frequently comes to her aid when other characters neglect to take her opinions and feelings into consideration, she stands up for herself when necessary, as when she rejects Henry Crawford’s marriage proposal as discussed previously in this chapter. During the rehearsal scenes for Elizabeth Inchbald’s play Lover’s Vows, she

204 Poovey, p. 212.
205 Lynch, p. 233.
becomes everyone’s de facto confidant because she proves to be the only observer and can listen without interjecting her own opinions: “Fanny, being always a very courteous listener, and often the only listener at hand, came in for the complaints and the distresses of most of them” (MP, p. 192). Fanny’s actions appear to be passive compared to more outspoken characters such as Mary Crawford, but her ability to listen is one of the clearest indications that she is intended as a model of the sentimental heroine. Her judgments of other people’s actions serve not as a negative reflection of her presumed superiority, but of her good manners.

Since Fanny’s inner activity does not show itself in conversation, her actions appear passive especially when compared to Mary Crawford, who directs conversation to take control of others. Miss Crawford’s education is largely based on social interactions, and she frequently alludes to her desire to marry well, an aspiration that occasionally causes her to speak inappropriately. Edmund Bertram, once captivated by her charm, incorrectly thinks that other people exercise a negative influence over her beliefs about the world, but Fanny learns that Miss Crawford more likely manipulates her situation using conversation. Just as Fanny finds Miss Crawford’s behavior incompatible with proper conduct, so too does Miss Crawford think Fanny’s actions unusual because she evades traditional social categories. At one point, she questions Edmund on Fanny’s social status: “Pray, is she out, or is she not?—I am puzzled.—She dined at the parsonage, with the rest of you, which seemed like being out; and yet she says so little, that I can hardly suppose she is” (p. 56). Within Miss Crawford’s categories of women, both words and actions help outside observers identify a woman’s stage of life that marks the end of childhood, though she places a greater emphasis on words. Fanny participates in social outings, an event that suggest that she is “out”—or, part of the social community—but her reticence suggests that she is “in,” or not ready for courtship and marriage. Fanny’s self-
possession defies traditional explanations, leading Mary to conclude that she is “in,” not yet a part of society, and also delaying Fanny’s path to marriage. Miss Crawford’s use of the words “out” and “in” not only reflect her fluency with popular jargon, but also recalls the act of entering or leaving a space such as a home, positioning women’s social status in relation to the domestic sphere.

In response to Miss Crawford, Edmund says, “My cousin is grown up. She has the age and sense of a woman, but the outs and not outs are beyond me.” Interestingly, Edmund defines Fanny with positive expressions of what she actually is, a woman with “sense,” but negatively defines her social position; he admits that the “outs and not outs” do not factor into his conception of her. We can read into Edmund’s response his rejection of the social categories that Miss Crawford puts forward; rather than repeating “in,” he says “not out,” introducing a third, liminal space that is neither within the social space of the marriage market, nor within the household space. It is almost as if Edmund’s ignorance places her outside the marriage market altogether, perhaps further illuminating why Fanny takes so long to participate in the courtship activities that her cousins indulge throughout the first part of the book. Pawl convincingly argues, “While [Fanny] remains childlike in many respects, she has acquired a series of behaviors appropriate to the fully developed heroine of sensibility: she blushes, trembles, weeps, and is often speechless.” Her silences, in other words, mark her as a “fully developed heroine” rather than an underdeveloped girl. Miss Crawford and Edmund’s inability to situate her within a particular social category signals their failure to read the signs of sentimental literature more than a particular lack within Fanny.

Pawl, p. 289. Later in the novel, Henry Crawford helps Fanny’s brother William to become a Lieutenant, and she reacts with like a typical sentimental heroine: “Fanny could not speak, but he did not want her to speak. To see the expression of her eyes, the change of her complexion, the progress of her feelings, their doubt, confusion, and felicity, was enough” (MP, p. 345).
Continuing their conversation, Miss Crawford then replies: “Till now, I could not have supposed it possible to be mistaken as to a girl’s being out or not. A girl not out has always the same sort of dress; a close bonnet, for instance, looks very demure, and never says a word. You may smile—but it is so I assure you—and except that it is sometimes carried a little too far, it is all very proper. Girls should be quiet and modest.” Here, Miss Crawford echoes the advice given in many conduct books, that young ladies “should be quiet and modest,” and that their “demure” behavior “is all very proper,” but her motivations for explaining this are suspect. Miss Crawford focuses only on how a girl’s behavior and manners are perceived by outside observers, forgetting that the underlying purpose for being modest is to maintain proper decorum before marriage and to guard against unsuitable behavior. She finds the transition between “in” and “out” all too sudden: “The most objectionable part is, that the alteration of manners on being introduced into company too sudden. They sometimes pass in such very little time from reserve to quite the opposite—to confidence! That is the faulty part of the present system. One does not like to see a girl of eighteen or nineteen so immediately up to every thing—and perhaps when one has seen her hardly able to speak the year before” (p. 57). The shift from silence to “confidence” unsettles the illusion presented by the girl’s behavior; if a girl were truly modest, she would not feel the need to suddenly speak too much. To illustrate her complaint, Miss Crawford describes her encounters with a young Miss Anderson: “When Anderson first introduced me to his family, about two years ago, his sister was not out, and I could not get her to speak to me … I could hardly get a word or a look from the young lady—nothing like a civil answer—she crewed up her mouth, and turned from me with such an air! I did not see her again for a twelvemonth. She was then out … She came up to me, claimed me as an acquaintance, stared me out of countenance, and talked and laughed till I did not know which way to look” (pp. 57–8). Miss
Crawford interprets Miss Anderson’s silences as rudeness when she does not reply to her conversation, and is then surprised by her sudden transformation into a talkative, laughing woman. Miss Crawford lays the blame for this “fault[]” in the “present system,” that is, the current mode of introducing young women into society, rather than the current model of education, possibly because she does not see female silence as belonging to a pedagogical scheme that aligns speech to proper conduct.

Much like Miss Crawford’s confusion regarding Miss Anderson’s behavior when she was “in,” Henry Crawford also finds Fanny’s character inexplicable: “I do not understand her. I could not tell what she would be at yesterday. What is her character?—Is she solemn?—Is she queer?—Is she prudish? Why did she draw back and look so grave at me? I could hardly get her to speak. I never was so long in company with a girl in my life—trying to entertain her—and succeed so ill! Never met with a girl who looked so grave on me!” (pp. 268–9). Crawford’s remarks triangulate the difference between speech and silence by adding a third category that examines how Fanny appears to others. Crawford’s frustration matches his fruitless attempts to woo her. Compared with the forward speech of Maria and Julia, both of whom are enamored with Crawford, Fanny proves a more difficult catch. Like his sister, Crawford locates Fanny’s reticence not as a reflection against himself, but as a default in her character, wondering if she is “solemn,” “queer,” or “prudish,” all negative responses to her reticence. Since we have seen Crawford misbehave for much of the first part of the novel, however, the narrator wryly encourages the reader to take his observation with a grain of salt. If Crawford cannot immediately see Fanny’s true worth, it is only because he is not deserving of her attention or affection.
The two conversations previously discussed identify Fanny as “not out,” according to Miss Crawford’s definition. When the novel stages her entrance into society during a ball held in her honor when her uncle returns to Mansfield Park, Fanny continues to resist speaking openly. At the ball, “she found herself occasionally called on to endure something worse. She was introduced here and there by her uncle, and forced to be spoken to, and to curtsey, and speak again. This was a hard duty” (p. 318). Fanny dislikes being “spoken to” and participating in non-linguistic signs of politeness such as the curtsey because it does not come naturally to her, yet the ball requires its attendees to participate in scripted social interactions. Despite her aversion to conversation, Sir Thomas is pleased with her progress, and their acquaintances favorably receive her since “she had no awkwardnesses that were not as good as graces” (p. 312). Fanny’s imperfections impress the guests as much as her newly acquired manners. She performs her “duty” out of respect for her uncle, but she does not appear to materially change after the ball ends until her family takes note of her newly manifested beauty. None is more taken with her appearance than Crawford, who says, “She was then merely a quiet, modest, not plain-looking girl, but she is now absolutely pretty.” (p. 268). Fanny does not turn into a talkative Miss Anderson, but she more easily resists the activities that she finds unappealing. Fanny continues to be shy, but her demonstrations of propriety become more visible.

Fanny learns correct moral conduct in spite of the education her aunt and uncle give her. At the beginning of the novel, Fanny’s mother, faced with the prospect of raising nine children, sends her to live at Mansfield Park because she had reached “an age to require more attention than her poor mother could possibly give” (p. 6). Yet when Fanny arrives at her new home, she finds herself neglected because of the vast difference between her education and that of her cousins. Compared to the vast wealth of knowledge about Europe and history that Maria and
Julia possess, Fanny’s education does indeed appear impoverished, but as the novel progresses, we learn that her capacity for sympathy means that she learns the fundamental lessons of “principle, active principle” that Sir Thomas finds his own daughters wanting: “they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice” (p. 536). Maria and Julia’s faults are caused by their own mother’s neglect of their moral education, and by the undue influence of Mrs. Norris on their education.

Though incredibly efficient at managing her own household expenses, Mrs. Norris is less adept at taking control over other people’s affairs. As an aunt, she acts as a surrogate mother figure for Maria and Julia, who assume her controlling demeanor without learning prudence. Although she refrains from taking Fanny into her own home, she offers Sir Thomas advice on why she should be adopted by Mansfield Park: “Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without farther expense to any body” (p. 7). In Mrs. Norris’s estimation, the only purpose for female instruction, like that offered by conduct books, is to help young women secure a husband and thus their livelihood and future happiness. Fanny rejects the belief that her goal should be merely to “settl[e] well,” and refuses Crawford’s advances because she follows her own moral compass by remaining true to herself, even though doing so temporarily offends her uncle’s sense of propriety. Lady Bertram echoes Mrs. Norris’s social advice when she criticizes Fanny for rejecting Mr. Crawford’s offer: “‘that it is every young woman’s duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this.’” Since “this was almost the only rule of conduct, the only piece of advice, which Fanny had ever received from her aunt in the course of eight years and a half,” Fanny feels unable to respond, and the narrator notes, “It silenced her” (p. 384). When Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram’s advice is contrasted with the good intentions of Fanny’s own mother
in sending her away, we can see how far afield the goals of conduct books are from their appearance in novels. Fanny’s moral fortitude comes from an internal drive, rather than the product of her strict adherence to other people’s advice. The novel’s ending rewards her reticence when she marries her first choice, Edmund, but though the novel adheres to the expectations of the marriage plot, many of Austen’s readers have found Fanny’s quietness strange and off-putting. In order to see the full range of introspection in Austen’s use of free indirect discourse, we must turn to her more brightly rendered conversational novels.

SENSIBLE SILENCE

Fanny in *Mansfield Park* represents an idealized version of feminine decorum, but Austen’s earlier novel *Sense and Sensibility* shows two different heroines struggling to find the balance between happiness and propriety. As Elinor and Marianne begin their courtships, they disagree on the best ways men should express themselves. Marianne encourages her sister to find a different suitor than Edward because he displays a lover’s enthusiasm, while Elinor believes that Marianne places too much weight on his expression of thoughts and sentiments. Her defense of Edward suggests that she values his inner worth: “The excellence of his understanding and his principles can be concealed only by that shyness which too often keeps him silent.” Silence in this instance forms part of Edward’s temperament, a characteristic that Elinor thinks adds to his charm. She continues: “I venture to pronounce that his mind is well-informed, his enjoyment of books exceedingly great, his imagination lively, his observation just

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208 Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Edward Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006). Subsequent references to *Sense and Sensibility* are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number.
and correct, and his taste delicate and pure” (p. 23). Elinor praises Edward by describing him in terms that Marianne respects, appealing to his good taste and education in proper amusements. Though he is shy and does not readily speak about his enjoyments, he is well suited for Elinor.

Edward represents the opposite of Marianne’s suitor, Willoughby, whose immaturity and unsuitableness as a husband derive from his inability to moderate his speech. Just as Marianne criticizes Edward’s reticence, so too does Elinor “censure” Willoughby’s “propensity, in which he strongly resembled and peculiarly delighted her sister, of saying too much what he thought on every occasion, without attention to persons or circumstances” (p. 58). Willoughby, despite his good-natured appearance and deference to Marianne on all topics, speaks without due attention to “persons or circumstances” and does not practice self-censorship. Elinor notes that he “resembles” Marianne in his propensity to say “what he thought on every occasion,” implicitly suggesting that the “peculiar[]” interest Marianne feels toward Willoughby is due to his feminine exuberance. Willoughby’s close resemblance to Marianne troubles Elinor not only because she does not approve of this quality in her sister, but also because men and women are supposed to be different. Even if Marianne speaks thoughtlessly, her future husband should not. The most biting aspect of Elinor’s criticism stems from her belief, grounded in the assumption that there are proper rules that govern both male and female speech, that Willoughby talks more than he should for his gender.

Willoughby’s inconstancy forces Marianne to reconsider her feelings toward Colonel Brandon, an older suitor, “a silent man of five and thirty” who prefers quiet enjoyment to enthusiastic expression and who Marianne initially disregards due to his reserved demeanor (p.
In contrast to Willoughby, whose romantic flights of fancy appeal to Marianne’s own flair for the dramatic, Colonel Brandon is diffident and comparatively cold, but his reticence means that he speaks only what he truly thinks and feels. Furthermore, Marianne respects his moderate displays of taste because they agree with her own feelings and demonstrate his sincerity, such as when she observes the reactions of her listeners during an evening recital:

Colonel Brandon alone, of all the party, heard her without being in raptures. He paid her only the compliment of attention; and she felt a respect for him on the occasion, which the others had reasonably forfeited by their shameless want of taste. His pleasure in music, though it amounted not to that extatic delight which alone could sympathize with her own, was estimable when contrasted against the horrible insensibility of the others. (pp. 41–2)

Colonel Brandon does not exhibit the “extatic delight” as other men, responding in a more subdued manner due to his age and temperament. He responds positively to the type of music Marianne likes, in comparison to the “horrible insensitivity of the others.” Sensibility, here, has a range of external displays; Colonel Brandon quietly manifests his display of compassion, while Willoughby merely mimics Marianne’s observations. Marianne learns how to moderate her speech so that it does not overpower Colonel Brandon. While *Sense and Sensibility* valorizes the

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209 While the narration suggests that Marianne’s first impressions of Colonel Brandon were not favorable, the subtlety of Austen’s free indirect discourse implies that she doubts her initial observations: “Colonel Brandon … was silent and grave. His appearance however was not unpleasing, in spite of his being in the opinion of Marianne and Margaret an absolute old bachelor … but though his face was not handsome his countenance was sensible, and his address was particularly gentlemanlike” (p. 41).
intent behind sympathy, Marianne’s chastisement skeptically questions the value of sentimental novels that the romantic plot does not fully answer.

Elinor and Marianne’s courtships contrast with the marriage of the incompatible Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, who represent the failure of sympathy. Their banter suggests that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Palmer can place himself or herself in the other’s position. Mrs. Palmer alienates her husband through conversation even as she criticizes him when he doesn’t speak. Mr. and Mrs. Palmer represent extreme variations of male and female conversational styles and often find themselves at odds. Mrs. Palmer enjoys gossiping and talks too much while her husband has a more reserved manner and rarely speaks. Since Mr. Palmer is often silent when Mrs. Palmer wishes he would speak, she invents language to fill in the gaps of their conversation, but as she does not listen to him when he does talk, she misreads his reactions, which in turn contributes to Mr. Palmer’s silence. Mrs. Palmer faults her husband for not practicing good conversational etiquette: “‘He cannot bear writing, you know … he says it is quite shocking.’” Mrs. Palmer claims that her husband dislikes writing and finds it “quite shocking,” presumably because words have the power to surprise and are unpredictable. When Mr. Palmer replies, “‘I never said anything so irrational. Don’t palm all your abuses of language upon me,’” Mrs. Palmer continues to talk over him, addressing their listeners rather than Mr. Palmer: “‘There now; you see how droll he is. This is always the way with him! Sometimes he won’t speak to me for half a day together, and then he comes out with something so droll—all about any thing in the world’” (S&S, p. 131). Mrs. Palmer assumes her husband is not as adept at communication as her because “sometimes he won’t speak to me for half a day together,” but even as she criticizes him for not speaking, she silences him when he does not say what she wants to hear. Mr. Palmer denies her allegations by claiming that what she says is “irrational,” without specifying what he means—either that he
would not write letters, that letters can be quite shocking, or perhaps both. He then turns her critique back to her: “don’t palm all your abuses of language on me.” Mr. Palmer’s use of the word “palm,” meaning both to misrepresent or pass off his wife’s opinions onto him, and an abbreviation of their name suggests that both Mr. and Mrs. Palmer misuse conversation since they are not able to communicate with each other.

The gendered dichotomy exemplified by the Palmers is more fully developed in the courtship between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth encourages Darcy to practice conversation, but he in turn teaches her not to rely overmuch on sociability when she learns that his silence is not the result of pride, but sincerity. Elizabeth initially rejects Darcy’s offer because she is unaware of his feelings for her and of her growing love for him. Elizabeth’s surprise at his confession of love delays their romance, which resumes once she learns how to interpret Darcy’s silences. Charles Hinnant claims that this is a common thread in Austen’s novels: “The outcome of an Austenian lover’s address is always uncertain. Without this essential uncertainty, it would presuppose an assumption about what the future will bring. Its enactment would not result in what Austen calls a love-match but would rather begin to take on the form of a courtship or seduction narrative. This uncertainty, which also applies to Austen’s heroines, *no doubt unsettles, often even silences the language of courtship, now compressed into a single climactic confrontation; but it also renders it believable and binding.*”

The uncertainty of response builds narratological tension into the plot; Darcy must be silent for the courtship plot to occur because it is only by directly engaging with his silence that Elizabeth

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210 Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006). Subsequent references to *Pride and Prejudice* are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

learns how to better respond to the feelings of other people. Elizabeth initially interprets Darcy’s silence as rudeness, yet the reader, who has access to his thoughts via free indirect discourse, knows that it is instead the product of extreme shyness and mounting passion for her. Elizabeth and Darcy’s education receives equal attention in the narrative so that by the end of the novel, both characters reform their behavior and improve their means of communication. In a typical Austenian romantic fashion, Elizabeth learns to accept and love Darcy after he expresses his own feelings.

Elizabeth’s education begins during the ball scene when she observes his aloof behavior. She forms her first impressions of him based on what other people say, namely that he is prideful and a snob because other people expect him to reciprocate their conversation despite his reticence. Since Elizabeth already feels embarrassed by her own sisters’ erratic behavior, she interprets his refusal to dance as a slight against her family. When she confronts Darcy on his perceived rudeness, he admits his difficulty with expressing himself in conversation: “I certainly have not the talent which some people possess,” said Darcy, “of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot catch their tone of conversation, or appear interested in their concerns, as I have often seen done.” Darcy’s confession registers his failure to interpret observations of other people’s character. His inability to “catch their tone of conversation” is

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212 Eighteenth-century critic William Hazlitt boldly states in his essay on “Characteristics” that silence within conversation is rude and describes the delicate balance between speaking too much (he criticizes the French for being too loquacious), and not talking at all: “172. We talk little, if we do not talk about ourselves. 173. We may give more offence by our silence than even by impertinence. 174. Obstinate silence implies either a mean opinion of ourselves or a contempt for our company: and it is the more provoking, as others do not know to which of these causes to attribute it, whether to humility or pride. 175. Silence proceeds either from want of something to say, or from a phlegmatic indifference which closes up our lips” (“Characteristics,” in Selected Writings, ed. Jon Cook [Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991], pp. 205–6). Hazlitt’s critique is grounded in Romantic guides to conversation, and centers primarily on the listener’s interpretation of silence rather than the reasons one might be silent in the first place.
further damning because it means that he is unable to sympathize with people based on their conversational style. Instead of blaming him for this difficulty, Elizabeth encourages Darcy to practice talking by comparing sympathetic exchange with learning to play the piano:

‘My fingers,’ said Elizabeth, ‘do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women’s do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I would not take the trouble of practicing. It is not that I do not believe my fingers as capable as any other woman’s of superior execution.’ (P&P, p. 197)

Elizabeth’s analogy posits that conversational ease requires development and repetition in order for the performer to acquire proficiency, much like playing the piano. She suggests that Darcy should overcome his reluctance to talk by “practicing” conversing with other people. This advice corresponds with Michaelson’s assertion that conversation was a learned activity rather than an inherent skill.213 Elizabeth encourages him to “practice positive politeness, those gestures that please the other and foster a sense of solidarity,” because this attention to formal codes of conduct is the primary means by which she knows how to communicate.214

Elizabeth assumes the role of instructor in her early acquaintance with Darcy. In contrast, Mr. Collins, her potential suitor, tries to control her domestic education based on the models

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213 Michaelson notes that polite conversation was necessary for maintaining good relations in England’s hierarchical society; Austen’s novels negotiate the “conflicts over pleasing politeness and plain sincerity” by “challenging the stereotype of woman’s language” established by conduct writers. See Michaelson, pp. 48–63.

214 Michaelson, p. 205.
provided by patriarchal conduct books. In a much quoted passage, Mr. Collins attempts to inform his future bride with reading recommendations, but she and her sisters reject the lessons of conduct books: “when tea was over, [Mr. Bennet was] glad to invite him to read aloud to the ladies. Mr. Collins readily assented, and a book was produced; but on beholding it, (for everything announced it to be from a circulating library,) he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read novels … Other books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose Fordyce’s Sermons” (p. 76). Mr. Collins’s preference for James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), an eighteenth-century conduct book that was still popular at the beginning of the nineteenth century, reflects the common belief that reading fiction was dangerous for ladies; novels, especially popular works that would have been stocked in a circulating library, could corrupt women’s morals. Austen includes this bit of knowledge about Mr. Collins as a knowing wink to the reader as her own novels would have been included in his disdainful assessment. Citing a passage from the conduct book, Claudia Johnson argues, “Fordyce’s commendation of the ‘amiable reserve’ of ‘elegant females,’ together with his underlying assumption that women’s primary desire and duty is to please men, especially through the affectation of modesty, may show us where Collins derives his notions of female conduct, but they do not provide us with standards flexible and intelligent enough to evaluate Elizabeth.”

With his reading selection, Mr. Collins positions himself as a potential suitor as he demonstrates his concern over their moral health, though the narrator’s disdainful tone makes us doubt his point of view.

Mr. Collins’s well-meaning choice does not go over well; after expressing her initial shock, Lydia interrupts him after three pages. Though her sisters try to silence her, Mr. Collins

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stops reading and replies, “‘I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes me, I confess;—for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction” (p. 77). Mr. Collins intends his observation to be a critique of Lydia’s behavior; since she does not have interest in listening to “books of a serious stamp,” she misses the benefit of receiving “instruction.” Just as Lydia does not understand the value of Mr. Collins’s instruction, however, so too does he misinterpret the scene that leads to his embarrassment. The Bennet women are not interested in listening because they would rather talk. Despite the negative reception he receives, Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth anyway, believing that in time it will be a good match. His proposal appears like one she should accept, but she rejects him because he is incompatible with her lively spirit.

Yet Elizabeth occasionally falls victim to the negative consequences of misreading, such as when she decides to visit her sister, Jane, who has been kept away from home with an illness. The narrator recounts the dismay she expects to encounter when she reaches the house: “That she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible to Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and Elizabeth was convinced they held her in contempt for it. She was received, however, very politely by them” (p. 36). Elizabeth internalizes the rules of proper behavior so that she anticipates their application to her own behavior when she thinks she has acted out of place. She believes that the other women are shocked by the impropriety of her actions, as she is “convinced they held her contempt,” though they do not vocalize their disapproval. Since the ladies “receive[]” her “very politely,” she does not have other evidence of their feelings, other than what she herself attributes to them. She displaces her embarrassment onto Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; her walk’s original intent, done out of
concern for her sister’s well-being, becomes subsumed under the discourse of proper behavior. The text suggests that Elizabeth’s anxiety may not be well founded. The scene changes its focus to the male observers’ point of view on Elizabeth’s appearance: “Mr. Darcy said very little, and Mr. Hurst nothing at all. The former was divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion’s justifying her coming so far alone. The latter was thinking only of his breakfast” (p. 36). Though Darcy does not speak much, he admires Elizabeth’s actions, suggesting that her appearance is less shocking than she herself believes. Unlike Mr. Hurst, who thinks only of his next meal, Darcy practices in a sympathetic exchange with Elizabeth, even if he cannot fully articulate his feelings.

Elizabeth begins to value Darcy’s silence when she interprets similar behaviors in his sister as shyness. Beyond her personal observations, she also listens to the positive affirmations other people give of his character. When she visits Pemberley, Mrs. Reynolds tells her: “There is not one of his tenants or servants but what will give him a good name. Some people call him proud; but I am sure I never saw anything of it. To my fancy, it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men” (p. 276). The comparison between Darcy and “other young men” situates his silence within a social registry that privileges conversation and transfigures the condemnation of his individual failings into praise; his “pride” can be understood as discretion as opposed to the irreverent conversations of other men. This interpretation of his silence appeals to Elizabeth’s sensibilities (she thinks, “In what an amiable light does this place him!” but does not voice her opinion). Once open to this possibility, Elizabeth reframes her perception of him so that she responds more generously when his introspective manner interferes with his capacity for spontaneous response. When he hears that her sister, Lydia, has eloped with Wickham, Elizabeth and Darcy exchange positions: “She burst into tears as she alluded to it, and for a few minutes
could not speak another word. Darcy, in wretched suspense, could only say something indistinctly of his concern, and observe her in compassionate silence” (p. 305). Darcy’s reactions illustrate the tension between sympathy and passivity. The narrative says that he watches “in wretched suspense,” but he initially “could not speak another word.” His compassionate silence indicates that Darcy feels deeply even though he does not say anything to comfort Elizabeth. His reaction does not differ significantly from his behavior earlier in the novel, but the narrative nevertheless presents this as a moment of departure because he and Elizabeth have learned to understand each other. Darcy’s silent expression of support demonstrates his suitability as a husband, but his education represents a shift from earlier examples of sympathy in the sentimental novel. Darcy does not repress Elizabeth’s expression of remorse, but listens patiently, allowing him to better understand her position and comfort her with his presence.

Darcy’s expression of sympathy makes possible the completion of the romance plot. Elizabeth previously interpreted his attitude as pride, but his posture suggests that he actively witnesses her distress: “Darcy made no answer. He seemed scarcely to hear her, and was walking up and down the room in earnest meditation; his brow contracted, his air gloomy” (p. 306). Austen’s description prefigures the Byronic hero, and presents his “earnest meditation” in an attractive light despite his “gloomy” appearance. Elizabeth believes that her sister’s indiscretion will cause their acquaintance to cease even as she discovers her love for him. After Darcy leaves the scene, he takes action by persuading Wickham to marry Lydia, thus preventing further embarrassment to Elizabeth’s family while demonstrating his continued affection for her. *Pride and Prejudice* proposes a mediated space between refined conversation and reticence and in doing so suggests that genuine sympathetic expression is more valuable than the forms in which it takes.
Austen’s last novel reveals that the substance of polite conversation is inextricably linked to its outer trappings, and without genuine feeling backing the dialogue, conversations can only simulate sympathetic expression. *Sanditon*, left incomplete at her death in 1817, represents a society in which all spoken language is a verisimilitude of conversation that is designed to mask sentiment and to hide true meanings. The town’s (and novel’s) name—Sanditon—alludes to its geographical location near the coast (“sand,” or the beach) and to the fashionable people who populate it (the *bon ton*). The novel signals a return to the comic themes of her juvenilia, albeit with an attention to the ways in which Britain had changed after the Napoleonic Wars, as Anthony Mandel argues: “Location takes center stage, with Sanditon subsuming its inhabitants into a hive-like mentality that reconstructs the town as an exclusive spa resort. Of course, the truth is that Sanditon is empty and ephemeral, symbolizing the condition of post-war England: trifling, vacuous, vain” ²¹⁶ In Sanditon, one’s manner of speaking is more important than is what is actually spoken. Although the characters’ utterances take on the appearance of objective truth, Austen’s use of free indirect discourse adds nuances that develop, expand, or contradict what they say. The double attribution of language to both individual characters and the narrator suggests that frank or unaffected speech is not really possible, a claim echoed by Mary Poovey: “This system … stresses instead the medium of representation itself,” over the political

resonances of speech. While the narrative style encourages a reliance on sympathy, since readers have access to both characters’ speech and their interior states, it also undermines the sincerity of communication when style has more value than substance.

Sanditon’s cozy exterior hides a population filled with hypocrites, imperfectly educated women, and rakish men. The heroine, Charlotte, who at the start of the novel exhibits a naïve and simplistic view of social conventions, undergoes a series of trials that teach her not to take what people say at face value. The mixture and variety of people gathered at the town creates a leveling effect on social classes that destabilizes her preconceptions of proper speech. Charlotte enters this landscape of double-speak without knowing or understanding the town’s customs, and as a result greets all of her new acquaintances with sincerity, not realizing that they may have unspoken motivations that run counter to their outward appearance. As she begins to circulate in Sanditon, the hypocrisies of the other characters are brought to light and she learns how to think independently from the scripted dialogue of the people around her.

The beginning of the novel highlights the tension between meaning and conversational practices. Sanditon opens with a conversation between two gentlemen, one who is revealed as the proprietor of a “young and rising Bathing-place” of the coast. “Everybody has heard of Sanditon,” declares Mr. Parker, though Mr. Heywood cynically replies that it is but another of the new, fashionable places that appears “every five years.” (S, p. 325). A host of characters, each looking to fulfill their desires at the beach town, gradually populate this imagined space.

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218 Austen, Sanditon, in Jane Austen’s Manuscript Works, ed. Linda Bree, Peter Sabor, and Janet Todd (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2013), 319–85, 325. Subsequent references to Sanditon are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by page number.
Sanditon has the trappings of other resort towns, and the conversations between the sexes retain capture the imprecision that characterizes high society’s use of language. The first chapter concludes when Mr. Parker’s daughters arrive to usher the guests into Sanditon: “The young Ladies approached and said every thing that was proper to recommend their Father’s offers; and in an unaffected manner calculated to make the Strangers easy” (S, p. 328). At first glance, their speech appears to be sincere, but the daughters speak using finely tuned language shaped by the customs of politeness. Their highly polished conversation, both “unaffected” yet “calculated,” has the sole purpose of luring guests to the establishment and to “recommend their Father’s offers” to the stranger. Their manner of speaking appears sincere and demonstrates that their fluency in sociability, but the narrator reveals that it is spoken with duplicity.

Sanditon represents an amalgam of the new beach towns that became a popular nineteenth-century travel destination. The heterogeneous mixture of people who flocked to resort towns gradually eroded class and gender boundaries, permitting people who otherwise would not socialize together to come together to talk. The result is a breakdown of language and communication that Mary Favret likens to a bursting “bubble”: “incompatible languages … clash on the shifting sands of a seaside resort. The fragment offers little hope that anyone with an ounce of sense, such as the heroine, can make any impact upon this world, or glean any meaning from its babble.” The novel descends into “babble” partly because the circulating social groups do not have a common language, but Sanditon’s satirical tone derives from an assumption

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219 Janine Barchas discusses how readers could easily follow Catherine Morland’s movements in Bath as Austen precisely maps her characters’ placement using real locations (see pp. 57–92).
220 Favret, p. 175.
that conversation is meaningless if its ultimate purpose does not serve to bring people closer to understanding each other.  

Spas and watering places provided a more egalitarian space for female discourse as women took advantage of the freedom of being outside their usual social spheres to challenge prevailing models of conversation. Spas were both public and private spaces, according to Alison E. Hurley: public in that much of their conversation was situated within a larger sphere of influence, but private in that their discourse was marginalized because it was considered insignificant. Female conversation, or “bath talk” was recognized as an important form of communal exchange insofar as it revolved around the actions of a select group of people and it highlighted the “dynamic potential of women’s conversation to serve the public good (here, the area of general rather than private interest).” Women could form communities that permitted them to challenge the legitimacy of conversation styles for which conduct books advocated, further destabilizing existing gender boundaries: “Spas helped women bypass the prevailing models of female friendship and female letters that submerged women’s alliances beneath the imperatives of a patriarchal society, thereby allowing them to develop a conversation that was truly their own.” As Charlotte mingle with the gentry collected at the resort, she makes

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221 Leland E. Warren argues that whereas conversation and sensibility were seen to be opposing forces in eighteenth century, with conversation prescribed as a guard against an excess of feeling, earlier courtesy books portrayed the two an inextricably linked: “although conversation may embody the other that stands outside the self and that is necessary for the existence of the inner sensibility, it is an outside that writers on conversation insist must be brought inside” (“The Conscious Speakers: Sensibility and the Art of Conversation Considered,” in Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics, ed. Sydney McMillen Conger [London: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1990], pp. 25–42, 30).


223 Hurley, p. 2.
friendships with women who fascinate her. Although Sanditon liberates her social mobility, she makes quick judgments based on her faulty intuition rather than reasoned consideration.

The gap between surface language and true meaning runs under the surface of Charlotte’s encounters, which she first interprets according to her expectations. Like Catherine Morland, Charlotte reads novels, and though “not at all unreasonably influenced by them,” she begins to view her new companions through the lens of the most recent book she has read, a volume of Burney’s *Camilla* (1796) (S, pp. 349 and 348). With a nod to Charlotte’s obliviousness to her own hypocrisy, the narrator describes how her readings of this novel form her first impression of Clara, a young woman newly introduced to Sanditon: “Elegantly tall, regularly handsome, with great delicacy of complexion and soft Blue eyes, a sweetly modest and yet naturally graceful Address, Charlotte could see in her only the most perfect representation of whatever Heroine might be most beautiful and bewitching, in all the numerous volumes they had left behind them on Mrs. Whilby’s shelves” (S, p. 349). The narrator’s superficial description of Clara, according to Charlotte’s viewpoint, focuses on her youth, beauty, and elegance. Charlotte displaces her desire for adventure onto Clara, believing that she deserves a story more than Charlotte because of her resemblance to a heroine. Since the reader knows that Charlotte is actually the heroine of the novel they are presently reading, the description of Clara rings hollow, especially since Charlotte arrives at these conclusions prematurely.

Despite Clara’s beautiful and elegant appearance, she has been taken as the protégé of the whimsical and wealthy Lady Denham, under whose auspices she could easily assume the negative qualities of the older woman. The narrator signals Clara’s vulnerability, but the other characters are blind to Lady Denham’s capricious behavior. Mr. Parker explains how Lady Denham’s “Love of Money is carried greatly too far,” but that “her faults may be entirely
imputed to her want of Education. (S, p. 334). While he acknowledges, “now and then, a Littleness will appear,” on the whole her actions are socially acceptable because of her generosity with her wealth (S, p. 334). As a reader of novels who professes not to be overly influenced by them, Charlotte should be suspicious of Lady Denham and by extension Clara’s association with her, but since wealth counts for more than polished education in Sanditon, her impression of Clara remains unquestioned.

Charlotte’s tendency to judge people based on first impressions holds true for the male characters as well. Her first introduction to Sir Edward casts him in a wholly favorable light:

Sir Edward was much her superior in air and manner;—certainly handsome, but yet more to be remarked for his very good Address and wish of paying attention and giving pleasure.—He came into the room remarkably well, talked much—and very much to Charlotte, by whom he chanced to be placed—and she soon perceived that he had a fine Countenance, a most pleasing gentleness of Voice, and a great deal of Conversation. She liked him.—Sober-minded as she was, she thought him agreeable. (S, p. 354)

Though presented objectively, Charlotte’s description of Sir Edward demonstrates her initial partiality to him. She remarks not only on his physical presentation (“her superior in air and manner;—certainly handsome”), but also on his attention to her (he “talked much—very much”). Like Sanditon’s other visitors, Charlotte assesses Sir Edward’s worth based on his appearance and attitude toward her. Unlike Marianne romantic infatuation with Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility, Charlotte’s portrait includes how he talks but not what he thinks. As she develops
feelings for him, her unspoken praise causes her to believe that he would be better suited for Clara. Charlotte seems naively willing to take his easy conversation at face value, but as she gets to know him better, she begins to question his behavior when it appears unmasculine and foppish. Sir Edward’s inclination to “a great deal of Conversation” turns out to be a fault rather than a virtue because he feels too much about everything without serious thought. Austen reveals that behind his slick façade lies a caricature of a sentimental hero: he gives too much consideration to everybody so that he is useful to nobody.

Her acquaintance with Sir Edward motivates her to make her own decisions about character rather than adopting another’s opinion. During one extended conversation, Charlotte begins to realize the extent of Sir Edward’s foolishness when he speaks rhapsodically about Sanditon: “He began, in a tone of great Taste and Feeling, to talk of the Sea and the Sea shore—and ran with Energy through all the usual Phrases employed in praise of their Sublimity, and descriptive of the undescribable Emotions they excite in the Mind of Sensibility—” (S, p. 354). Like Willoughby, Sir Edward is informed by “great Taste and Feeling,” but it soon becomes clear that his conversation contains only phrases from philosophical tracts and conduct books. Charlotte notes that he speaks in clichés (he applies “all the usual Phrases”) and nonsensical words (his speech is “descriptive of the undescribable Emotions”). Sir Edward is overly consumed with displaying his capacity for sensibility, but he does so in a manner that is so ridiculous that she “could not but think him a Man of Feeling—till he began to stagger her by the number of his Quotations, and the bewilderment of some of his sentences” (S, p. 354). Sir Edward’s insincere conversation disappoints Charlotte, and her assessment of him as a Man of Feeling suggests that he is nothing more than an absurd abstraction of sentimentality.
As previously discussed in the introduction, Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771) appeared at the height of the sentimental novel’s popularity. Although conduct books and philosophical tracts advocate using sympathy as a motivation for proper conversation, novels such as *Man of Feeling* reveal the problematic social interactions when taking the sentimentality to its logical conclusion. Sir Edward, unlike Harvey, does not have a cause to champion, so he relies on potted quotations to express his emotion. Sir Edward’s prattle leads Charlotte to see through his artifice, and, as she learns that there is nothing genuine or original about his speech, “she began to think him downright silly … why should he talk so much Nonsense, unless he could do no better, was un-intelligible.—He seemed very sentimental, very full of some Feelings or other, and very much addicted to all the newest-fashioned hard words—had not a very clear Brain, she presumed, and talked a great deal by rote” (*S*, p. 357). Sir Edward uses “all the newest-fashioned hard words,” but Charlotte suggests that he does not know how to use them properly, as his speech conveys a muddled expression of vague emotions: “he was full of some Feelings or other.”

Charlotte’s disapproval of Sir Edward’s careless use of poetry suggests that readers of the domestic novel had become fatigued by the sentimental novel’s use of stock phrases. Though she tries to correct him when he misattributes his quotations and encourages him to use more sincere expressions of feeling, he disregards her censorship and continues unabashedly: “But who is perfect?—It were Hyper-criticism, it were Pseudo-philosophy to expect from the soul of high toned Genius, the grovellings of a common mind … nor can you, loveliest Miss Heywood—(speaking with an air of deep sentiment)—nor can any Woman be a fair Judge of what a Man may be propelled to say, write or do, by the sovereign impulses of illimitable ardour” (*S*, p. 357). Sir Edward claims that Charlotte cannot presume to understand him because she is a woman, but
it is actually Sir Edward who misuses language. His attempts to elevate his speech to sound more sophisticated hide that his thoughts and feelings are actually quite shallow, something that Charlotte sees, but does not immediately accept because he seems genuine. By speaking at Charlotte but not necessarily to her, Sir Edward reveals that he misunderstands the fundamental purpose of conversation—to communicate with others.

When she realizes that Sir Edward’s foolish speech is nothing short of babble (his hyper-use of language makes her think him “downright silly” [S, p. 357]), Charlotte demonstrates her maturity while also assuming the role of a heroine. Unlike earlier novels, Sanditon’s female protagonist critiques male reading (and speaking) habits. The narrative structure breaks down at the level of the sentence, and Charlotte’s fragmented thoughts modify earlier statements by reinforcing prior observations. Sanditon is mostly told in a series of fractured sentences punctuated by hyphens. The novel’s form as a draft and not polished prose suggests that Austen is working through the themes and content of the story even as she writes it, since her earlier novels do not contain nearly as many instances of hyphens, but it has a secondary effect of showing characters thinking through their own thoughts and feelings in the moment. The meta-fictional context of this scene operates in a slightly different way than the self-awareness of Northanger Abbey; Austen’s first and last novels both feature heroines who make judgments of other characters based on what they read and both show the inappropriateness of relying on predetermined plots or packaged quotations to convey an individual’s own desires and feelings. Whereas Catherine Morland defers to Henry Tilney’s judgments in Bath, Charlotte makes her own decisions based on her observations. Northanger Abbey finds its moral core in the heroine’s ability to distinguish fact from fiction, but Sanditon finds it in Charlotte’s ability to close the gap
between language and meaning, and in so doing, demonstrates the flaws of the sentimental novel.

Charlotte’s disapproval of Sir Edward’s inability to speak sincerely as he boasts of the ease with which he can (mis)quote other’s words shows her capacity to successfully navigate their social world by learning how to better read the flawed people around them. When Charlotte next encounters Lady Denham, the elder woman, “like a true great Lady, talked and talked only of her own concerns,” and their conversation chiefly involves the marriage prospects between Sir Edward and Miss Denham (S, p. 358). Though Charlotte contributes occasionally by agreeing with her, she begins to feel indignant about the matter. Yet instead of voicing her dissatisfaction, “She kept her Countenance and she kept a civil Silence. She could not carry her forbearance farther; but without attempting to listen longer, and only conscious that Lady Denham was still talking on in the same way, allowed her Thoughts to form themselves into such a Meditation” (S, p. 361). Charlotte demonstrates that true manners are expressed not through idle gossip, but by restraining her speech. By allowing her heroines to use conversational silence as a means to maintain their dignity and happiness, Austen suggests that reticence need not always signal society’s control over women, but a sincere representation of a character’s interiority.

_Sanditon_’s satiric allusion to Mackenzie’s _The Man of Feeling_ reveals that vestiges of the sentimental novel continued to play into the plots of the domestic novel. At times, Charlotte’s critique of Sir Edward’s does not appear all that dissimilar from male characters’ moral judgment of despondent female characters in sentimental novels. Austen reverses the gendered order of sympathetic exchange as well as the tone, for Charlotte’s analysis of Sir Edward’s behavior is humorous, not melancholic. If _Sanditon_ lacks the outrageous comedic scenes of her earlier novels, its dry humor permits Austen to reclaim sympathy in its purist form, as a way to
understand and value the experiences of another without superimposing one’s own point of view. As Charlotte dismantles the framework upholding the resort town’s frivolous networks, she decouples sympathy from the sentimental novel, which, from Austen’s point of view, had merely used it for show. The differences between Sir Edward and his sentimental predecessors prompt us to reread sympathetic discourses not only in the domestic novel, but also in other genres including the gothic and historical novels.

The deftness of Austen’s pen ensured her popularity, but as Mandal convincingly argues, it also undermined critic’s recognition of her input into the novel’s development. Mandel cites Richard Bentley’s republication of Austen’s novels in 1833 as the start of the public’s erasure of her contributions, and in particular Henry Austen’s preface to Sense and Sensibility, which he titled “Memoir of Miss Austen” (1833). Mandal argues that the preface “diminishes Austen’s aesthetic development” while it “reinforces a myth of her unique and perfect ‘originality,’”

thereby disconnecting Austen from her contemporaries as it elevated the value of her novels. Bentley’s Standard Novels editions stifled critiques of the novels even as it guaranteed that her novels would never go out of print. Yet Austen contributes significantly to the history of the novel, and her revision of proper conversational models helps to negatively define the artificiality of language. By the time Austen reshaped the domestic novel, sympathy no longer stood for a manner of speaking, but for reflective compassion for our fellow men and women. Austen mocks excessive displays of emotion, preferring to show her heroine’s worth through silence, not hysterics. As her female characters learn to express themselves unencumbered by affect and artifice, Austen builds fictional worlds governed by sincere connections between

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224 Mandal, p. 208.
individuals that her readers wished to join. As a result, Austen freed sympathy from cliché and melodrama so later authors could use sentimental plots to effect real change.

To that end, I have examined silent introspection, aphasia, and reticence to determine how the sentimental novel informs Romantic period texts. In *Romance of the Forest* and *The Italian*, Ann Radcliffe demonstrates how the sublime can produce positive moments of introspection, allowing women to remain silent even when pursued by dangerous figures. Walter Scott’s *Bride of Lammermoor* actualizes the gothic’s potential for violence, and shows that externally imposed isolation can produce self-inflicted aphasia. Finally, Frances Burney and Austen’s domestic novels reveal that female silence can operate as a morally sanctioned method to disrupt society’s speech-based hierarchies. Each of these novelists defended their stylistic choices by pointing to their need to revise the sentimental novel’s plot to overcome negative market forces. The shift from society’s repressive admonishment for female silence to self-derived reflexivity signals the changing cultural attitudes toward female individuality that occurred during the nineteenth century.

In discussing the social implications of silence within the novel, I have not limited myself to conversational exchanges; rather, silence appears as both a literal and metaphorical feature of the Romantic period novel. The emergence of new genres between the start of the French Revolution and the end of the Napoleonic wars was not a spontaneous occurrence but one that had its roots in the development of the eighteenth-century novel. As novelists charted new ground with the style and substance of their narratives, the edges between genres bleed into each other, allowing later authors even more flexibility to explore female interiority. Without Radcliffe’s rhetorically evasive techniques; Scott’s assertion of female autonomy; Burney’s affirmation of an individual’s authenticity; and Austen’s precisely measured prose, later readers
may not have embraced the outspoken voices of nineteenth-century protagonists such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). The eponymous narrator of Brontë’s popular novel is never silent, but expresses her appreciation for both solitude and community. When Jane arrives at Thornfield Hall, she writes of her frequent retreats to private corners of the house: “Then my soul relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind’s eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it.” Like Radcliffe’s heroines Adeline or Ellena, Jane finds solace in introspective moments, but her silence also indicates her restless boredom: “Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do.” Jane’s desire for equality with men echoes that of Elinor in Burney’s *The Wanderer* and the energy of her prose similarly vibrates with a desire for a more interesting life.

Containing traces of the gothic and domestic novel, paired with the structure of a coming of age story, *Jane Eyre* resists easy classification. The influence of Romantic period writers nevertheless appears in Brontë’s consistent use of narrative silence to show the emotional and psychological depth of her heroine. Like the women writers who came before her, however, Brontë originally published *Jane Eyre* under a male pseudonym, Currer Bell. Social modesty continued to prohibit women’s full involvement in the nineteenth-century publishing marketplace as equals. Even as Romantic novelists reclaimed sympathy as a social bridge between individuals, silence represented a positive form of expression for characters, and possibly, but not necessarily, for their creators.

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