

The British Trauma Novel, 1791-1860

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that the British trauma novel emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century, in response to the rise of individualistic conceptions of personal integrity and to the increasing value given to ordinary human life. Moments of intense suffering began at this point to register as shocking and traumatic violations of the boundaries of identity, and early- to mid-nineteenth-century trauma novels explore this cultural opposition between suffering and individuation. In such novels, individual boundaries are frequently imagined in architectural terms, while trauma is cast as a spatial violation of private territory. Although these texts provoke expectations of medical and narrative cures by combining scientific imagery with the marriage plot, they ultimately question the therapeutic teleology of medical science and the educative teleology of the *bildungsroman* and domestic novel. They instead locate the source of trauma in the bourgeois model of bound subjectivity propagated by both literature and science. This account of early- to mid-nineteenth-century novelistic trauma as a primarily spatial phenomenon differs from modern theories of trauma that focus on distortions in time. It reorients trauma scholarship away from the traumatic memory and towards the relationship between suffering and discrete selfhood.

My first chapter argues that Elizabeth Inchbald's 1791 novel *A Simple Story* replicates and ironizes the eighteenth-century novelistic depiction of suffering as central to human subjectivity. In Chapters 2-4, I focus on nineteenth-century novels in which suffering instead becomes a traumatic violation of selfhood. In Mary Shelley's *Matilda*, trauma destroys the personal boundaries that block intimacy, so the protagonist keeps her wound open and refuses to heal. In *A*

Tale of Two Cities, Charles Dickens emphasizes the problematic dimensions of both bound bourgeois identity and inter-subjective working-class selfhood. In this novel, open models of personality engender repetitive violence, while bourgeois privacy creates the traumatic experience of unassimilable pain. In *The Woman in White*, Wilkie Collins implies that the boundaries protecting the individual self are illusory, as his characters are subjected to constant traumatic violations that negate coherent, self-directing identity. Each of these trauma novels expresses respect for the individual and compassion for human suffering, both of which characterized the valuation of ordinary life that arose at the turn of the nineteenth century. They nonetheless question whether atomistic subjectivity, conceived spatially in terms of rigid borders, is the best protection against psychological pain.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse soutient que le roman de trauma britannique a émergé au tournant du XIXe siècle en réponse à la montée des conceptions individualistes de l'intégrité personnelle et à la valeur croissante accordée à la vie humaine ordinaire. Les moments de souffrance intense ont commencé à être compris comme étant des violations choquantes et traumatisantes des frontières de l'identité, et les romans de trauma du début jusqu'au milieu du XIXe siècle contribuent à cette opposition culturelle entre la souffrance et l'individuation. Dans ces romans, les limites individuelles sont souvent imaginées en termes d'architecture et le traumatisme est présenté comme une violation du territoire privé. Bien que ces textes provoquent des attentes de guérison grâce aux traitements médicaux et au remède narratif, qui combinent l'imagerie scientifique avec le récit traditionnel du mariage, la téléologie thérapeutique de la science médicale, ainsi que la téléologie éducative du *bildungsroman* et du roman domestique, sont remis en cause. Le roman de trauma localise la source du traumatisme dans le modèle bourgeois de subjectivité close propagée dans la littérature et la science. Cette interprétation du traumatisme romanesque du début et du milieu du XIXe siècle comme étant un phénomène essentiellement spatial diffère des théories modernes de traumatisme qui mettent l'accent sur les distorsions dans le temps. Cette lecture éloigne le traumatisme de son association avec l'idée de la mémoire traumatique et le rapproche à la relation entre la souffrance et l'individualité discrète.

Mon premier chapitre soutient que le roman d'Elizabeth Inchbald de 1791, *A Simple Story*, reproduit et ironise la représentation romanesque de la souffrance

au XVIII^e siècle, quand elle était soulignée comme un élément central de la subjectivité humaine. Dans le deuxième et le quatrième chapitre, je me concentre sur des romans du XIX^e siècle, dans lesquels la souffrance devient au contraire une violation traumatisante de l'individualité. Dans le roman *Matilda* de Mary Shelley, le trauma détruit les limites personnelles que bloque l'intimité, de sorte que le protagoniste conserve sa blessure ouverte et refuse de guérir. Dans *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens met l'accent à la fois sur les dimensions problématiques de l'identité close de la bourgeoisie et de l'identité intersubjective de la classe ouvrière. Dans ce roman, les modèles ouverts de la personnalité engendrent une violence répétitive, tandis que la vie privée bourgeoise crée l'expérience traumatisante de la douleur inassimilable. Dans *The Woman in White*, Wilkie Collins suggère que les frontières qui semblent défendre l'individu sont illusoires, car ses personnages sont soumis à des violations traumatiques constantes qui nient l'identité cohérente et autonome. Chacun de ces romans de trauma exprime le respect de l'individu et de la compassion pour la souffrance humaine, ce qui caractérise l'augmentation de la valeur attribuée à la vie ordinaire à la fin du XIX^e siècle. Ils soulèvent néanmoins la question de savoir si la subjectivité atomistique, conçue spatialement en termes de frontières rigides, est la meilleure protection contre l'angoisse psychologique.

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INTRODUCTION

Shock, Trauma, and the Nineteenth-Century Transformation of Suffering

Shocking news, explosive violence, and sudden reversals of fortune frequently debilitate characters in nineteenth-century British novels. In Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Marianne sickens and almost dies when she discovers that the man she loves has taken up with another woman. In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Cathy Linton falls into a rage, starves herself, and becomes feverish, hypersensitive, and delusional in the aftermath of a violent confrontation between Heathcliff and Edgar. Elizabeth Gaskell's eponymous heroine Ruth is "stunned into unconsciousness" when her lover leaves her, and her physician diagnoses her with "a thorough prostration of strength, occasioned by some great shock on the nerves" (105).

Critics have frequently examined such depictions of love mad or hysterical women,¹ but nineteenth-century novels' focus on the after-effects of shocking events extends to men. When Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein first beholds his creation come to life, the "beauty of the dream" instantaneously turns to "breathless horror" (57). In the immediate aftermath of the event, he oscillates between a quick pulse and "languor," his "flesh tingle[s] with excess of sensitiveness," and he falls into a nervous fever for several months (58, 61). Once

¹ See, for instance, Janet L. Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narrations of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France*; Elisabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents*; Evelyne Ender, *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Hysteria*; Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*; Claire Kahane, *Passions of the Voice: Hysteria, Narrative, and the Figure of the Speaking Woman, 1850-1915*; Philip W. Martin, *Mad Women in Romantic Writing*; Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*; and Helen Small, *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel and Female Insanity, 1800-1865*.

Victor recovers, his memories continue to torture him, and much of the novel details his avoidance, obsessive fatalism, and vertiginous alternations between guilt and self-vindication. Victorian male characters generally experience more mundane shocks and terrors than Victor's, but they nonetheless exhibit similar psychological and physical breakdown. In William Makepeace Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon* (1844), Barry Redmond describes the devastating long-term effects of violent military discipline:

I have seen the bravest men of the army cry like children at a cut of the cane The French officer . . . was in my company, and caned like a dog. I met him at Versailles twenty years afterwards, and he turned quite pale and sick when I spoke to him of old days. 'For God's sake,' said he, 'don't talk of that time: I wake up from my sleep trembling and crying even now' (102).²

In Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-3), Richard Carstone collapses and later dies after hearing that his inheritance has been spent in legal fees; Sir Leicester Dedlock has an apoplectic fit and becomes aphasic after he finds out about his wife's pre-marital sexual past; and even Mr. George, paragon of masculine military strength, is pale, shaken, and "rather knocked . . . over" after he watches a young boy die (699).

Shock is, indeed, a rather dangerous business in these novels, and characters go to extreme lengths to cushion the effect of upsetting news. In *Bleak*

² Nicholas Dames sees Thackeray's depiction of traumatic memory as an exception to the much more common Victorian tendency to produce "a secure . . . willed . . . retrospect that disconnects the present from the past" (10). In contrast, my work examines how such exceptional examples of literary trauma challenge and thwart the novelistic work of shaping and erasing personal history.

House, Inspector Bucket tries to avert Sir Leicester's shock by revealing the truth about his wife slowly and by appealing to masculine and aristocratic pride:

Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet . . . it's my duty to prepare you for a train of circumstances that may, and I go so far as to say that will, give you a shock. But . . . [a] gentleman can bear a shock when it must come, boldly and steadily. A gentleman can make up his mind to stand up against almost any blow. Why, take yourself, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet. If there's a blow to be inflicted on you, you naturally think of your family. You ask yourself, how would all them ancestors of yours, away to Julius Caesar—not to go beyond him at present—have borne that blow; you remember scores of them that would have borne it well; and you bear it well on their accounts, and to maintain the family credit. (756-7)

Inspector Bucket's attempt to shore up Leicester's manhood by referring to a crumbling honour culture is, of course, being satirized in this passage. While Bucket's concern about the potentially overwhelming effect of this news is sound, his appeal to family honour is ineffective. Up until this point, Leicester has identified firmly with this dying *ethos*, but when he finds out about his wife's past, he does not display stoic insensibility. He shows little concern for his honour and name, and he challenges no one to a duel. Instead, he is shaken completely by the threat to his wife's wellbeing. He, like the other characters in the novel (both male and female), is sensitive to emotional pain and susceptible to shock and psychological breakdown in the face of it. In dramatizing the impotence of honour culture to combat this sensitivity, Dickens tracks a key change in the British value

system and affect structure, a change that makes shocking news such a serious threat.

I borrow the term “affect structure” from translations of the work of Norbert Elias, a historian of the emotions whose work I examine in detail in Chapter 1. I use this term to describe the culturally transmitted modes of being that shape how emotions are expressed and understood, and that determine which emotions will be evoked in particular contexts. My work thus builds on a growing interdisciplinary body of research on the history and social construction of emotions.³ Although I use Elias’s term, I do not adopt all of his assumptions. As Barbara H. Rosenwein has pointed out, Elias relies upon a hydraulic model of emotional response that was dethroned in the 1960s and 1970s by cognitive psychologists and social constructionists (834-7). According to the hydraulic view, emotions are like water under pressure, controlled or released based on social expectations; the emotions themselves are universal and unchanging, but their expression is shaped by social context. Later historians of the emotions, such as William Reddy, instead emphasize that emotions themselves are created by cognitions and in response to social environments. In this dissertation, I use the term “affect structure” to convey the psychosocial framework not only for controlling and expressing, but also for creating particular emotional states.

As I will argue in more detail below, late eighteenth-century changes to the British affect structure involved an increased sensitivity to human suffering, as

³ Influential texts in this field include Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*; William S. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*; Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History;” and Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards.”

well as a growing inability to resolve it through violence or to incorporate it into patterns of religious, social, or literary meaning. With the rise of individualistic conceptions of integrity of the person and the increasing value given to ordinary human life (cultural developments to which the novel contributed), moments of intense suffering are understood and represented differently. They begin to be treated as violations of the boundaries of individual identity, rather than as central to human subjectivity, community-building, and cosmic meaning. Suffering in nineteenth-century novels therefore registers as shocking and traumatic; it also increasingly figures as a threat to the character-building process such novels chart. To be sure, many nineteenth-century novels, including *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*, incorporate suffering into the character-building process and present painful experiences as mere obstacles to overcome in the process of maturation. Franco Moretti argues that the role of the *bildungsroman* in particular is “to build the ego” in such a way that “formation as an individual” ultimately “coincides without rifts with one’s social integration” (Moretti 11, 16).⁴ The novel, according to Moretti, is an “elusion of tragedy” that sidelines “whatever may endanger the Ego’s equilibrium” (12). This dissertation analyses a counter-tradition of novels featuring characters that never recover from traumatic psychological wounds that challenge coherent selfhood and threaten the relationship between individual and society. This suffering cannot be sidelined or overcome and it therefore destroys these characters’ identities and sense of meaning.

⁴ For other discussions of the nineteenth-century novel’s depiction of the achievement of individual subjectivity in tandem with social discipline, see, for example, Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719–1900*, and D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*.

My first chapter begins by assessing Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791) as a counter-example of an eighteenth-century novel in which suffering is central to the formation of identity. I then turn to a series of early- to mid-nineteenth-century novels that link suffering to the traumatic dismantling of character. My second chapter examines the protagonist of Mary Shelley's *Matilda* (1819-20),⁵ who becomes so psychologically tortured after her father's confession of incestuous desire and his subsequent suicide that she stubbornly resists all healing and embraces death. My third chapter analyses Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). In this novel, Dr. Manette's unjust imprisonment in the Bastille destroys his memory, identity, and capacity for self-control. Though he seems to recover several times, moments of distress or danger transport him mentally back to his prison cell, and there is no reason to believe that this psychological damage is healed at the end of the novel. In my final chapter on Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-60), I focus on the traumatized character Laura Fairlie, who recovers basic functionality, but who remains psychologically incoherent and vulnerable because she is never able to remember the traumatic experience of being locked up in a mental asylum.

In each of these three novels, the characters' suffering resists political, moral, and religious signification. Such suffering is not a sign of virtue, as in the eighteenth-century sensibility tradition, or path to redemption or self-awareness,

⁵ Shelley wrote *Matilda* between 1819 and 1820, but it was not published in her lifetime. She sent the manuscript to her father, William Godwin, who objected to her depiction of father-daughter incest, and who refused to return the manuscript to her. The novel was first edited by Elizabeth Nitchie and published in *Studies in Philology* in 1959. For more on the publication history of *Matilda*, see Janet Todd's introduction to *Mary/Maria/Matilda*.

as it might have been in religious allegory or in tragedy. Neither is it aesthetically pleasing or decorous, as in many eighteenth-century sentimental and Gothic novels. Matilda frustrates her own and others' attempts to filter her story through the conventions of poetry or sentimental fiction. Manette cannot use his credibility as *ancien régime* martyr to save his son-in-law from revolutionary violence. Laura does not prove her virtue or strength in the face of her abuse. In these novels, modern scientific frameworks for making sense of human pain are also signal failures. Though the narrators frequently describe the effects of shock and grief in scientific terms, and though characters often call for doctors to tend to characters in distress, medical intervention is either useless or destructive. In each of these texts, suffering is shocking and senseless. It deforms character and resists medical, domestic, and novelistic solutions.

Though the nineteenth-century novel is certainly not the first literary genre to represent intense suffering, grief, or madness, these brief examples suggest that suffering begins, at this time and in this genre, to register in a slightly new way. Specifically, these examples demonstrate that the emphasis shifts to the unexpected, shocking, and unspeakable nature of terrible events, and thus, to the way that they disrupt the expected pattern or plot of life experience. This dissertation examines such novelistic representations of psychologically painful experiences towards two ends. First, I investigate their relationship to changing views of suffering as depicted in eighteenth and nineteenth-century medical literature. Second, I use these representations to chart the rise of and challenges to individualistic conceptions of integrity of the person. I argue that, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the novel of psychological trauma emerged out of a

literary, scientific, and political culture that increasingly valued the individual, interiority, and human rights and that therefore cast suffering as a threat to identity. I focus on four novels written between the 1790s, when the rise of individual human rights discourse crystallized the eighteenth-century problematization of suffering, and 1860, when a coherent medical model of nervous shock first began to be articulated in Britain. I argue that the trauma novel, as it emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century, explores the implications of the growing cultural opposition between identity and suffering, and engages critically with contradictory contemporary scientific and literary discourses that promised to explain and cure psychological pain.⁶

In order to advance this argument, I examine nineteenth-century medical and social contexts that challenge any assumption that psychological reactions to pain remain unchanged over time. Though I use the modern term “trauma” throughout my writing, I do not intend to project a contemporary understanding of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on to Romantic and Victorian novels. I am keenly aware of the significant differences not only between eighteenth and nineteenth-century novelistic representations of suffering, but also between nineteenth- and twentieth- or twenty-first-century beliefs about the effects of and cure for psychological ailments. For most of the nineteenth century, for instance, the ability to repress horrifying experiences out of consciousness was considered an

⁶ Some notable examples of scholars who have also analysed the relationship between nineteenth-century imaginative and scientific literature are Gillian Beer, Jenny Bourne Taylor, George Levine, Sally Shuttleworth, Elaine Showalter, Laura Otis, Peter Morton, and Lawrence Rothfield.

adaptive mechanism rather than a symptom, a belief that clearly differs from modern assumptions.

Nineteenth-century novelistic depictions of shocking events, nonetheless, do have enough in common with the modern trauma concept, while being sufficiently different from earlier conceptions of human suffering, to justify my use of the term “trauma” in its psychological sense. I define trauma as an overwhelming experience of shock or grief, understood as an unnatural violation of the expected course of a normal life. In the novels I study, as in modern parlance, trauma disrupts the relationship between individual and community by threatening the boundaries of intact selfhood and by radically challenging the ideological structures and social relations that secure meaning. Defining trauma in this way differentiates these experiences from earlier understandings of suffering as a natural, meaningful, or expected part of human existence. Although nineteenth-century representations of trauma rely upon important lines of continuity with earlier representations of suffering, and although depictions of meaningful or natural suffering do not disappear in the 1790s, I argue that a relatively new traumatic mode of understanding and experiencing psychological pain first gains a central importance in Romantic and early Victorian literature. Though the medical establishment had not organized this category of experience into a coherent medical diagnosis, early nineteenth-century trauma novels nonetheless foreground and explore its implications.

This study also relies on the term “trauma novel,” which is common in scholarly discussions of contemporary novelistic representations of shock and grief, but which has not been widely used in nineteenth-century studies. The

phrase was popularized by Ronald Granofsky, who “reserve[s] the term ‘trauma novel’ for those contemporary novels which deal symbolically with a collective disaster” (5). He differentiates these texts from “works of any genre and any period which deal centrally with trauma,” and which he instead calls “literature of trauma” (5). Although the novels I examine in this study certainly do not fit the parameters delineated by Granofsky, the term “literature of trauma” is nonetheless too vague to describe this very specific form of novel. The British trauma novel that emerged in the early- to mid-nineteenth century is not just *about* trauma; trauma is central to its structure and characterization. Despite Granofsky’s very restrictive definition of the term, other critics have defined “trauma novel” more broadly. As Michelle Balaev explains,

The term ‘trauma novel’ refers to a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels. A defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world.

(150)

The trauma novels I examine accord more closely with this more inclusive definition. As I argue below, however, nineteenth-century trauma novels do engage with very particular nineteenth-century literary conventions and cultural contexts, which must be examined in order to understand the perceptions of self and world that the trauma challenges. In the trauma novel as it emerged in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, memory plays a somewhat less important role

than in the modern texts Balaev examines. Instead, the representation of suffering as a violation of personal boundaries and the resultant breakdown in discrete identity are what engender the “new perceptions of the self and world.”

The trauma novels I examine mimic the conventions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelistic genres, such as the domestic novel, *bildungsroman*, gothic novel, historical novel, and novel of sensibility, while at the same time, they also undo the assumptions about suffering and human identity upon which such novels relied. As I argue in Chapter 1, eighteenth-century sentimental and gothic novels frequently represent suffering and identity as mutually constitutive. Sentimental heroes and heroines react to distress and abuse by sighing, weeping, and fainting in such a way as to mark their innocence and to establish their moral quality. Gothic heroines prove their virtue by remaining dignified in the face of imprisonment and the threat of sexual violence. The spectacle of violence and suffering is central to character development, and it is under the pressure of such suffering, frequently unto death, that eighteenth-century characters fully reveal the nature of their identities. When nineteenth-century trauma novels invoke the conventions of such genres, this relationship between suffering and character is no longer tenable.

In contrast to eighteenth-century gothic and sentimental novels, nineteenth-century *bildungsromane* and domestic novels more commonly sideline psychological pain, or present it as a temporary obstacle to be overcome. At this point, pain and suffering begin to seem antithetical to coherent identity and interiority. Many nineteenth-century novels use the psychosocial technologies of the marriage plot and *bildungsroman* to allow characters to build egos by moving

beyond the painful and horrifying experiences that negate character. Such novels chart the growth and development of protagonists from a state of immaturity and conflict to one of mature and socially integrated happiness, a process that frequently involves understanding, healing, and ultimately forgetting the intense moments of psychological anguish that characterize their early lives. Such novels are therefore therapeutic, moving from problem to diagnosis and cure. The trauma novels I examine provoke similar expectations of narrative and medical cures by combining scientific imagery with the marriage plot. Yet they ultimately question the ameliorative energy of domestic novels and *bildungsromane* and the therapeutic goal of medical science. They instead locate the source of trauma in the bourgeois subjectivity propagated by both literature and science.⁷

i. The Critical Context: Approaches to Trauma in Literature

Literary depictions of psychological trauma have received a great deal of scholarly attention over the last twenty years and the majority of this work has relied on psychoanalytic trauma theory as an interpretive framework. During most of the nineteenth century, however, the term “trauma” referred only to physical wounds, and it was not until the late nineteenth century that it came to be applied

⁷ Deidre Lynch has noted that, in response to critical assessments of the conservative, disciplinary agenda of nineteenth-century novels, scholars have produced a series of readings intent on uncovering, within realism, covert underminings and disruptions of ‘the subject’—readings that redeemed certain canonical novels from the charges of naïve conventionality and ideological complicity. . . . In their tendency to glamorize the unconventional, the arguments against realism often rehabilitated the very individualism that they sought to contest. (16)

Though my own readings trace disruptions of the individual subject, my goal is not to glamourize this breakdown. The novels I examine reveal the dark implications of bourgeois subjectivity, but they do so by exploring the psychological horror that ensues when its expectations and boundaries are violated.

to emotional experiences. An organized medical discourse of nervous shock first arose in the 1860s and 1870s in the aftermath of the Civil War in America and in response to insurance claims filed by those suffering the psychological after-effects of train accidents in England.⁸ Pierre Janet, Josef Breuer, and Sigmund Freud introduced the specifically abreactive model of trauma in the decades that followed; as Allan Young argues, the “parasitic,” “pathogenic” memory, which is directly implicated in traumatic symptoms, and whose unearthing and narration forms the key to treatment, is an “invention” of the 1890s (29).⁹ After the First World War, research into shellshock drew broad public attention to the after-effects of horrifying experiences, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the most recent conception of trauma in the modern West, was introduced into the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1980 to treat the psychological pain of Vietnam War veterans (Caruth *Explorations* 3). The field of trauma theory exploded in the nineties as scholars outside the discipline of psychology used a combination of

⁸ For more detailed accounts of the history of the trauma concept, see Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*; Ralph Harrington “The Railway Accident: Trains, Trauma, and Technological Crises in Nineteenth-Century Britain;” Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*; Jill L. Matus, *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*; Marc Micale, “Medical and Literary Discourses in the Age of the American Civil War;” Marc Micale and Paul Lerner, “Trauma, Psychiatry, and History: A Conceptual and Historiographical Introduction;” Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*; and Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*.

⁹ Young argues that this conception of memory is what differentiates the late nineteenth-century concept of trauma from earlier understandings of shock or suffering. Unlike regular memory, traumatic memory “remains unassimilated, a self-renewing presence, perpetually reliving the moment of its origin. An ordinary memory is a trace, the pathogenic memory is a mental ‘parasite’ to use Théodule Ribot’s term (1883: 108-109)” (Young 29). Defined in this way, trauma is certainly a late nineteenth-century invention, but I use a broader definition of the term in order to emphasize some of the commonalities between the early nineteenth-century and later experiences.

psychoanalysis and the clinical category of PTSD to make sense of the post-traumatic experience and its relationship to memory, representation, language, and narrative.¹⁰

In a review of Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky's *The Marked Body: Domestic Violence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Melissa Valiska Gregory insists on the value of this kind of psychoanalytic theory to nineteenth-century literary studies.¹¹ She argues that "investigating the gaps and vacancies in these texts demands that the default approach to the nineteenth century, cultural studies, take a back seat to psychoanalysis, which is in many respects perhaps better equipped for grappling with elusive and immaterial details" (689). Yet despite their strength in dealing with textual nuance, literary critics using trauma theory frequently assume that psychic reactions to pain and textual strategies for representing it have remained unchanged over time. In *Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse*, for example, Deborah Anna Logan analyses Hetty from George Eliot's *Adam Bede* as though she were a real woman suffering from PTSD (112). Jill L. Matus criticizes this kind of "retrospective diagnosis of anguished fictional subjects as suffering from trauma" because it assumes that trauma is "a timeless and historically transcendent category" (8)

¹⁰ Some prominent examples include Dominick LaCapra in history, Lawrence Langer in English and art history, and Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman in comparative literature and film studies.

¹¹ For a fairly straightforward application of modern clinical understandings of trauma to Victorian literature, see Judith Sanders' unpublished doctoral dissertation "Silent Treatment: Metaphoric Trauma in the Victorian Novel." For other examples of the use of psychoanalytic trauma theory in scholarship on nineteenth-century literature, see Julie A. Carlson, *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley*; Diane Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës*; and Mary Jacobus, *Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading*.

rather than a cultural construct. Literary scholars outside of nineteenth-century studies have also criticized the universalizing tendencies in trauma scholarship. Balaev, who is a contemporary Canadian literature scholar, opposes the “discursive dependence upon a single psychological theory of trauma,” insisting that scholars need to examine the “larger cultural context that contains social values that influence the recollection of the event and the reconfiguration of the self” (149).

In response to what they have seen as the anachronistic projection of trauma theory onto the past, Matus and other historically-minded scholars have worked to historicize the trauma concept, tracing its development back to its roots in late nineteenth-century Western medicine.¹² Although the historical approach to trauma has proven useful for uncovering how and why the trauma concept was medicalized, institutionalized, and popularized in the late nineteenth century, it has thus far been primarily *non-literary* in its focus, and has either ignored literature or made it an uncomplicated part of a larger history of trauma. What trauma theorists do well—the attention to literary nuance, subtext, and form, and the recognition of what Geoffrey Hartman has called a distinctly “literary knowledge” (545)—is for the most part lacking from the new trauma studies.¹³

¹² See, in particular, Hacking, Leys, Lerner, Micale, and Young.

¹³ A notable exception is Gretchen Anna Braun’s unpublished 2009 dissertation “A Writing of Fire Within: Trauma, Transgression, and Gender in Victorian Fiction.” Braun draws on both twentieth-century trauma theory and Victorian medicine in order to build an argument about literary form in Victorian women’s novels written between 1853 and 1876. She contends that women writers used the depiction of traumatized emotional states to enact new narrative forms that better represented women’s changing experiences than did more conventional genres, such as the *bildungsroman* and marriage plot. While this approach affords some interesting insights into the effect of Victorian gender ideology, Braun’s argument does not account for the increasingly common Victorian depiction of traumatized men, an important focus of my project. My argument

Matus is the only published scholar working in an extended way on a historically-informed understanding of trauma that includes an analysis of Victorian literature, and her careful work on the links between late-Victorian medical and fictional discourses on psychic shock in *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* exemplifies the usefulness of a cultural studies approach to the topic.

Despite her focus on fiction, Matus's primary goal is historical, as she "traces the emergence of trauma as a concept and object of knowledge in an array of disciplinary formations" in the late-nineteenth century, and treats "the literary text not only as an index of cultural reactions to scientific concepts, but also as an agent in developing discourses of the mind and body" (8). In other words, Matus examines the conversation that occurred across a range of discourses, including the novel, in order to understand how and why the trauma concept emerged.

Matus's study of Victorian shock is a very useful contribution to the genealogy of trauma, but she is more interested in intellectual history than in questions of literary genre and form. This is not to say that Matus neglects literary analysis, and indeed, her work presents some fascinating insights into the role genre plays in shaping the developing discourse of trauma. For instance, in her discussion of "The Signal-man" (1866), she argues that the generic conventions of the ghost story allow Dickens to communicate the feeling of haunting associated with the persistent return of traumatic memories, a symptom that had not yet been articulated in medical discourse. However, a close attention to the literary and

also differs significantly from Braun's in the sense that I trace how the form of the nineteenth-century novel contributed to producing the bounded subjectivity that was the precondition for traumatic experience. Nineteenth-century novelistic representation of traumatic experience then, in turn, challenged the novelistic form from whence trauma arose. Braun asserts a more straightforwardly causal argument that societal changes in women's experiences in general, and in gender roles in particular, made particular narrative forms inadequate.

generic traditions within which other nineteenth-century trauma novels operate challenges some of Matus's conclusions. For instance, her work distinguishes between the broader social and ethical roles trauma played in the Victorian era and the twentieth century, differentiating the twentieth-century "wound culture" from the Victorian "conscience culture" she finds in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), as Gwendolyn's traumatic memories are presented as a spur to self-analysis and ethical growth (158-9). While this astute formulation goes a long way towards explicating Eliot's morally-driven realism, Matus's delineation of a Victorian "conscience culture" cannot be extended unproblematically to provide a framework for understanding the shocks and sufferings depicted in other genres, such as the Gothic or sensation novel, which rely upon the convention of wronged innocence.

In "The Invention of Trauma in German Romanticism," Fritz Breithaupt also examines the genesis of the trauma concept and its relationship to literature. Instead of investigating the articulation of a Victorian medical model of trauma, as Matus does, Breithaupt considers the emergence of trauma as an experience in the late eighteenth century. He ties the experience of trauma, as represented in eighteenth-century literary and medical writings, to the Romantic desire for transcendent selfhood, and argues that when Romantics could not attain a stable sense of self, trauma became the substitute, the explanation for its absence and the proof of its once having existed (77-8). While Breithaupt's brief article is invaluable for the link he establishes between trauma and individualism, he presents no sustained readings of literary texts; like Matus, his interest is primarily historical, or perhaps literary historical. My goal in this dissertation is not to write

an intellectual history of the advent of the trauma concept that uses novels as primary evidence, but rather to trace changing conceptions of trauma in order to better understand the implications for the novelistic tradition.

Of course, nineteenth-century poetry and drama frequently represent the effects of shocking or horrific psychological experiences, and a broader study might engage productively with a variety of genres. My goal, however, is to understand the particularly novelistic ramifications of the depiction of traumatized characters. In particular, I am interested in the way in which depictions of psychological trauma are used to interrogate the relationship between individualism and social constraint that the nineteenth-century novel helps create. Each of the trauma novels I examine struggles self-consciously with the novelistic tradition and generic conventions that produce a particular kind of subjectivity. They depict trauma as the result of this tradition and a glaring challenge to it.

Another key difference between my work and that of Matus and Breithaupt is that I focus on fiction written between the emergence of the experience of trauma, which Breithaupt dates to the late eighteenth century, and the advent of the medical model of nervous shock, which Matus locates in the 1860s. No full-length literary study has examined this crucial period in the transformation of attitudes to human suffering.

ii. Changing Views of Suffering in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain

The nineteenth-century conceptualization of suffering as trauma relied upon relatively new attitudes about the value of the individual human life. Charles

Taylor has argued that, before the eighteenth century, the “Willingness to risk life was the constitutive quality of the man of honour” (*Sources* 212). However, in the modern period, “the locus of the good life” shifted from glory attained through the violent disregard of life to “‘life’ itself. . . . defined in terms of labour and production, on one hand, and marriage and family life, on the other” (*Sources* 213). Following this logic, then, suffering becomes traumatic when it disrupts the modern narrative of the course of a happy human life, in which individuals find fulfillment in domestic relations and useful work. This life-plot dominates the nineteenth-century British novel, the genre that perhaps most forcefully articulates the new vision of the good life that Taylor describes. If we recall Inspector Bucket’s appeal to honour culture when trying to strengthen Sir Leicester, it becomes clear that Sir Leicester’s susceptibility to traumatic wounding is a symptom of his modernity. He is not particularly concerned about upholding the honour of his family name, but is in fact desperately worried about the wellbeing of his wife. Such characters are vulnerable when their domestic, emotional, and material wellbeing is threatened, and this vulnerability is partly a consequence of the post-Enlightenment sacralization of the domestic affections and conceptualization of suffering as a violation, rather than a confirmation, of the natural order.

With the rise of human rights discourse, particularly in the individualist mode that Knud Haakonssen and Dror Wahrman have argued replaced inter-subjective collective rights doctrine in the late eighteenth century,¹⁴ many forms

¹⁴ Although human rights discourse is generally identified with figures like John Locke,

of pain and suffering once thought inevitable, or even beneficial, were re-conceived as violations of individual rights. For eighteenth-century reformers, as well as their nineteenth-century Benthamite successors, individual suffering did not need to be understood or justified; it needed to be eradicated. As Harold J. Perkin describes the transition,

Between 1780 and 1850 the English ceased to be one of the most aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty nations in the world and became one of the most inhibited, polite, orderly, tender-minded The transformation diminished cruelty to animals, criminals, lunatics, and children . . . suppressed many cruel sports and games, such as bull-baiting and cock-fighting . . . rid the penal code of about two hundred capital offences, abolished transportation, and cleaned up the prisons (280)

Taylor, Elias, and Michel Foucault have all noted a similar eighteenth-century attitudinal shift with respect to public punishment, torture, duels, and other forms of human-inflicted violence.¹⁵ Taylor argues that the increased sensitivity to human suffering that arose at this point is one of the defining characteristics of

David Hume, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the more sharply individualist turn is identified more firmly with later figures like Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. For more on this shift, see Haakonssen's chapter "From Natural Law to the Rights of Man" in *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment*. He differentiates between the early- to mid-eighteenth-century understand of rights as inextricable from duties, a conception that was grounded in early modern notions of natural law, and late-eighteenth-century individualist human rights discourse. Wahrman analyses this argument and integrates it into a larger analysis of the late-century rise of discrete, bounded individualism on page 307 of *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity And Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*.

¹⁵ See, in particular, Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

Western modernity (*Sources* 394, 13): “It’s not that . . . horrors don’t occur in the twentieth-century West. But they are now seen as shocking aberrations” (*Sources* 13).

This belief that intense human suffering should be the exception rather than the rule was the premise behind the twentieth-century definition of PTSD. In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) first defined a traumatic event as something “outside the range of ordinary human experience” (238). This definition was revised in the DSM-IV in 1994 to account for experiences, such as domestic and sexual abuse, that psychologists increasingly came to understand were relatively common. Yet the new definition was based on similar assumptions about the essentially shocking nature of suffering and of contact with death. A traumatic experience must involve:

direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate.

(424)

When compared to the pre-modern age, with frequent witnessing of public punishment and executions, the commonplace deaths of children from illness and of women in childbirth, and the association of honour with the disregard of life, it becomes clear that this definition does not describe trauma objectively. Instead, it

reflects the post-Enlightenment value system and beliefs that made human suffering specifically traumatic.

Though I trace the role that culture plays in rendering the experience of suffering traumatic, this is not to say that trauma is a mere fiction, a sign of personal weakness, or an invention of a culture gone soft, as trial lawyers representing child molesters or military institutions denying veterans benefits have frequently claimed. If a belief in human rights and the integrity of the person produces trauma, an absence of these beliefs would not reduce suffering, and would likely contribute to a rise in violence and abuse. What the novels this dissertation analyses do reveal is that the reformist impulse to reduce human suffering, while in itself laudable, has been accompanied by the relegation of suffering to an exceptional, almost unimaginable category of experience.

Changing religious beliefs also inflected the eighteenth-century shift in the understanding and experience of human pain. As Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo explains, suffering became “problematic” at this point as “the old explanations, the mechanisms that allowed the daily transformation of pain into sacrifice, began to give way” (92, 93). Gonzalbo emphasizes the importance of Enlightenment rationalists’ and dissenting religious groups’ shared rejection of the concept of original sin, without which human pain became purposeless and unnecessary. Taylor links the modern world’s increased sensitivity to human pain to changing views about human participation in the cosmic order. He argues that pre-modern cultures viewed public punishment as a restoration of the cosmic balance that could be thrown off by crime. In the modern period, by contrast:

The whole notion of a cosmic moral order, which gave this restoral its sense, has faded for us. The stress on relieving suffering has grown with the decline of this kind of belief. It is what is left over, what takes on moral importance, after we no longer see human beings as playing a role in a larger cosmic order or divine history.¹⁶

(*Sources* 13)

Voltaire's 1755 *Poem upon the Lisbon Disaster*, a devastating critique of theodicean attempts to find religious meaning in the midst of human disaster, stands as a particularly compelling example of this shift. Voltaire confronts the "savants" who insist "All's for the best," and he demands that they face "this carnage, broken stone, / Rags, rubble, chips of shattered wood and bone, / Women and children pinioned under beams" (13), a scene of human suffering that defies Christian interpretation. For Voltaire, this disaster is not a manifestation of God's plan, an act of divine punishment, an invitation to prayer, or an opportunity for meditation on the transitory nature of human life; instead, it makes a mockery of the idea of a loving Christian God and of a universe in which human suffering plays a vital role in the larger cosmic order. Gonzalbo notes that, without these traditional frameworks, Voltaire describes the earthquake "as if it were something never before seen. . . . Human pain has acquired a different weight: it matters; it shocks; it affects much more easily" (103).

¹⁶ Therefore, although images of suffering do not disappear in the nineteenth century, they tend to take on different meanings. Elizabeth A. Dolan has emphasized that, with the rise of print culture, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britons were inundated with abolitionist accounts of the suffering of slaves, as well as animal rights accounts of the suffering of animals (25-8). Such tales of suffering now constituted a political argument, based on the relatively new assumption that the very existence of suffering constituted proof of a problem in the social or political structure.

Eighteenth-century sentimental novels nonetheless continue to make suffering a central spectacle and locus of value, as I discuss in Chapter 1. They also continue to rely on Christian frames of reference for understanding suffering. Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, for instance, is in many ways an updated martyr story. Yet *Clarissa*'s enthralled and emotionally invested readers were shocked by her tragic death at the end of the novel, and protested vehemently that she should have been granted a worldly reward for her virtuous suffering (Todd *Sensibility* 73). Richardson even felt compelled to defend her death as the more appropriately Christian ending (Todd *Sensibility* 73), thus highlighting an emerging competition between the Christian belief in an otherworldly reward for earthly suffering and the utopian reformist impulse to eliminate pain altogether. Although Richardson's novel is located firmly in an earlier tradition, in which human suffering is meaningful to human identity and to a larger cosmic order, his readers' shock at *Clarissa*'s death exemplifies the beginning of a shift in readerly expectations. Their reaction, together with Richardson's recognition of the necessity of defending his choice, suggests that the eighteenth-century problematization of suffering inflected even those literary traditions that cast suffering as central to human subjectivity.

Nineteenth-century Benthamite reformers followed in the Enlightenment utopian tradition, marshalling science, technology, and rational public policy to the cause of eliminating pain (Gonzalbo 148), and many nineteenth-century novels' happy endings and marriage plots enact a similar eradication of suffering in the artistic realm, thereby satisfying the demands of the kind of readers who reacted so negatively to *Clarissa*'s death. Unlike the eighteenth-century

sentimental novels that make suffering central to the formation and expression of subjectivity, nineteenth-century novels increasingly present suffering as a threat to identity. A narrative of overcoming suffering to achieve individuation and fulfillment in marriage and career dominates the nineteenth-century novelistic tradition, and it is this reformist narrative that is threatened by the continuing existence of violence and the suspicion that emotional pain cannot always be overcome. The trauma novels I examine in this dissertation combine novelistic and medical narratives of diagnosis and cure in order to highlight the weaknesses and limitations of both the literary and scientific reformist impulses. They highlight the problems inherent in the nineteenth-century opposition between suffering and identity, and in contemporary assumptions about the boundaries separating self and other.

iii. Trauma and the Modern “Self in a Case”

I have argued thus far that the modern experience of trauma emerges from the eighteenth-century problematization of suffering, but it relies equally upon individualist conceptions of selfhood that emerged in the late eighteenth century, and that twentieth- and twenty-first-century Western medicine and psychiatry frequently treat as universal. In his analysis of the cultural dimensions of PTSD, Derek Summerfield criticizes the Western “view of trauma as an individual-centered event” (18). He argues that the PTSD concept is of limited usefulness for understanding victims’ experiences of war and torture in non-Western contexts:

the debate about torture in Western countries has been concerned with the long-term effects of what is seen as an extreme violation

of individual integrity and identity. But what of non-Western peoples who have a different notion of self in its relation to others and the supernatural? What if the maintenance of harmonious relations within a family and community is given more significance than an individual's own thoughts, fantasies, and aspirations? Here, the cultural emphasis will be on dependency and interdependency rather than on the autonomy and individuation on which many Western ideas about mental injury have been predicated. (20)

Summerfield makes an important point about the relationship between trauma and individuation, and though his comments are directed explicitly at contemporary non-Western cultures, they could also apply to Western cultures before the rise of secular medicine, individualism, interiority, and human rights discourse.¹⁷

Beginning with the work of Marcel Mauss and Clifford Geertz, scholars have long argued that the sharply individuated self that Western culture takes for granted is a product of historical and cultural circumstances.¹⁸ Literary historians have linked the emergence of this individualist self to the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century. According to Ian Watt, characters in Samuel Richardson's novels express a private interiority that would find its mature expression in the

¹⁷ For instance, in "The Fear of Disease and the Disease of Fear," David Gentilcore analyses cases of sudden fright in early modern Italy. He examines a series of accounts of miraculous religious cures of those suffering from illness or demonic possession as a result of terrifying experiences. Applying trauma theory to these experiences would be just as problematic as applying it in non-Western contexts today.

¹⁸ See in particular, Clifford Geertz, *Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali* and Marcel Mauss, "A category of the human mind: the notion of person; the notion of self."

nineteenth-century novel (174-207, 296-99). Wahrman has criticized this idea that eighteenth-century novelists were engaged in “tentative and incomplete attempts to achieve the same psychological depth” that Jane Austen later perfects (181) and credits Deidre Lynch for “liberat[ing] the eighteenth century from its retrospectively imposed interiority complex” (182). Lynch argues instead that the interiority of literary characters only emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century as part of a process by which readers strove to differentiate themselves in an era of literary mass production (6). Wahrman echoes such claims, arguing that, for most of the eighteenth century, the English subscribed to what he calls the “*ancien régime* of identity,” characterized by “the relatively commonplace capacity of many to contemplate—without necessarily facing some inescapable existential crisis . . . – that identity . . . could prove to be mutable, malleable, unreliable, divisible, replaceable, transferable, manipulable, escapable, or otherwise fuzzy around the edges” (198). Wahrman contends that a deep, inward-looking, and bounded self emerged only in the late eighteenth century in Britain, after the American War of Independence.

As Wahrman puts it, this “very particular understanding of personal identity . . . presupposes an essential core of selfhood characterized by psychological depth, or interiority, which is the bedrock of unique, expressive individual identity” (xi). Delineated in spatial terms, the modern Western self is deep, bounded, and separable from the outside world. Elias has traced the modern Western “civilizing process” that gave rise to this inviolable “self in a case” or “*homo clausus*” (475, 472). Following Elias, Taylor uses similar spatial images to differentiate what he calls the “porous self” of pre-modern cultures from the

“buffered self” that dominates the modern Western world (*Secular* 35-42). The modern self, Taylor argues, is based on an “inside-outside” opposition: “We think of our thoughts, ideas, or feelings as being ‘within’ us, while the objects in the world which these mental states bear on are ‘without’” (*Sources* 111). The late eighteenth-century physiognomist Johan Kaspar Lavatar exemplifies precisely this demarcation: “Man is free as the bird in a cage. He has a circle of activity and sensibility whose bounds he cannot pass. As the human body has lines which bound it, every mind has its peculiar sphere in which to range; but that sphere is invariably determined” (qtd. in Wahrman 297). Wahrman argues that this bird represents the “newly fixed inner core of selfhood” and the cage the “impermeable boundaries of identity” (297).

Modern trauma theory rests on the assumption that it is natural and healthy to have such an integral inner self, protected by a strong barrier. Trauma is therefore an unnatural violation. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth uses images of invasion and possession to describe the threat trauma poses to discrete selfhood. She insists that “in trauma . . . the outside has gone inside without any mediation” (*Unclaimed* 59) and that “overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them” (*Trauma* 151). In a similar vein, Mary Jacobus argues that “the damaging impingement of the environment on the individual—the collapse of inner and outer—remains an inescapable component for the so-called survivor” (169). Following Freud, contemporary theorists have also explored the way trauma produces doubling, dissociation, and fragmentation, operating under the assumption that a healthy identity is not porous or divided. Nevertheless, Wahrman has established the

eighteenth century comfort with “doubling, splitting, or transmigrating of identities” (176). If people in a particular culture do not see themselves as having a unified, buffered, inner self, then modern trauma symptomology would seem like a pathologization of healthy, natural states. In cultures without this sense of the integrity of the person, suffering would be understood and represented differently; it would not be traumatic, as I have defined the term. This is not to say that people living in cultures that are comfortable with porous or divisible identity will not suffer, or that they will suffer less seriously, but rather that their suffering will be figured, understood, and experienced differently. It is only in the nineteenth century that people, and particularly middle- and upper-class people, begin to take such a bounded, integral self for granted as the natural healthy state. At this point, then, threats to this spatially conceived identity begin to register specifically as traumatic.

Although twentieth-century trauma theorists do rely on spatial images of the bounded self, they nonetheless focus primarily on the idea of trauma as a temporal phenomenon. As Young points out, trauma is commonly understood as a “disease of time” (7). In Lawrence Langer’s study of Holocaust writing, he emphasizes the “two clocks” of Auschwitz testimonials: one moves forward, while the other “fixes the memory permanently in memory and imagination, immune to the vicissitudes of time” (175). Caruth also emphasizes that “the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness” (*Trauma* 9). In a similar vein, Jean Laplanche examines the “temporal model of trauma” that emerges from Freud’s seduction theory: “First, there is the implantation of something coming from outside. And this experience, or the memory of it, must

be reinvested in a second moment, and then it becomes traumatic. It is not the first act which is traumatic, it is the internal reviviscence of this memory that becomes traumatic” (qtd. in Caruth “Interview” par. 25, 7). Despite Laplanche’s focus on spatial images of violation at the beginning of this statement, he contends that spatial violation is simply the precondition for trauma, which is defined temporally by the relationship between two moments in time.

In contrast, I argue that early- to mid-nineteenth-century trauma novels insist most consistently on the spatial dimensions of individual identity and of its violation. In such novels, spatial and architectural imagery represents the constraints of the modern Western view of character as bounded individuality. Prison houses, asylums, and claustrophobic Great Houses symbolize paradoxically imprisoning and protective social structures and the oppressive and defensive boundaries of socially conferred, discrete selfhood. These architectural images are also connected to the texts’ novelistic structures; they represent the generic conventions that proffer individuated selfhood within particular constraints. The novels I examine also make copious use of early to mid-century medical and psychological models of mind and character that relied on similar architectural and spatial metaphors, and which operated in dialogue with this spatialized view of identity. Some psychological models, such as moral management, emphasize the necessity of maintaining the boundaries of a disciplined subjectivity. Other discourses, such as Romantic neurology, Associationism, and theories of double consciousness, explore the breakdown or

violation of these kinds of personal boundaries.¹⁹ The trauma novels this dissertation examines demonstrate that this spatialized view of identity and the body is the precondition for trauma, for the experience of suffering as a shocking violation of limits.

iv. Individuation and the Privatization of Space

This new model of bounded, private, and integral selfhood arose alongside the privatization of space in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England.²⁰ A survey of this widespread cultural association of demarcated spaces with individuation helps clarify the significance of nineteenth-century trauma novels' obsessive use of architectural and spatial images to represent intact or violated selfhood. Of particular relevance to the individuation of space are the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Enclosure Acts, which appropriated to individuals the use and ownership of what had been commonly held land. This property was then subdivided with hedges and fences, to mark the boundaries of individually owned

¹⁹ See Laura Otis, *Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science, and Politics* for a convincing analysis of the link between nineteenth-century literary and scientific obsessions with boundaries. Otis emphasizes the importance of cell theory and germ theory in imperial conceptions of the self in terms of an inside-outside opposition. She highlights the nineteenth-century conception of the will as a powerful force to withstand nefarious mental and physical influences. Although her work focuses primarily on the latter half of the nineteenth-century, much of it on the decades after the triumph of germ theory in the 1860s and after the novels I examine were written, she refers to Lawrence Rothfield's important insight that the conception of life as independent cells emerged soon after the rise of bounded selfhood in the late eighteenth century, and was perhaps inspired by it (Otis 4, Rothfield 97). Though metaphors of invasion inspired by the germ theory of infectious diseases do not dominate the early- to mid-nineteenth-century novels and scientific writing I examine, these texts are nonetheless concerned with the inside-outside juxtaposition that Otis and Rothfield track.

²⁰ My account of the spatial dimensions of bourgeois individuation is indebted to E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* and to Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*. I have drawn on their analyses of enclosure and the privatization of land and on the links they have drawn among identity, class, and space.

territory. Robert P. Marzec has linked these Enclosure Acts to eighteenth-century novelistic depictions of the individuating process; in such novels, he argues, “identity maturation” is linked to “gaining a legal right to the land” (132).²¹ Although property ownership had traditionally been linked with paternalistic ideals of aristocratic responsibility to the common good, in the nineteenth century, *laissez-faire* ideology severed ownership from communal responsibility. Private property continued to be identified most firmly with the landed aristocracy, but middle-class entrepreneurs, guided by individualistic and competitive ideals, nonetheless continued to buy estates and move to the country,²² thus further strengthening the connection between individualistic identity and private ownership of land.

This trend extended to the middle-class ownership of individual homes, which came to be viewed as manifestations of and protections for individual identity. In *Great Expectations* (1860-1), for example, the clerk and bill collector John Wemmick fashions his little cottage into a castle, which he hopes will protect him from the threats of a hostile external world:

Wemmick's house was a little wooden cottage . . . and the top

²¹ According to Thompson, at the turn of the nineteenth century, self-interested landowners had a stake in denying the poor the independence that might accompany such land ownership. He quotes from an 1800 issue of the *Commercial and Agricultural Magazine*, which cautions against recognizing the claims of the poor to a portion of land in the process of being enclosed: “When a labourer becomes possessed of more land than he and his family can cultivate in the evenings . . . the farmer can no longer depend on him for constant work” (qtd. in Thompson 220). After the commons was enclosed, denying the poor access to land ownership kept them in a situation of dependence that differentiated them from the individuated property-owning classes.

²² For more on the aristocratic abdication of traditional paternal responsibilities and on the rise of the middle-class entrepreneurial ideal, see Perkin’s *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880*.

of it was cut out and painted like a battery mounted with guns.

. . . . “That’s a real flagstaff, you see,” said Wemmick, “and on Sundays I run up a real flag. Then look here. After I have crossed this bridge, I hoist it up-so—and cut off the communication.”

. . . . “Then, at the back,” said Wemmick, “out of sight, so as not to impede the idea of fortifications . . . there’s a pig, and there are fowls and rabbits; then, I knock together my own little frame, you see, and grow cucumbers . . . if you can suppose the little place besieged, it would hold out a devil of a time in point of provisions.” (189)

Despite its medieval trappings, Wemmick’s castle is not designed to protect an entire community. It is, instead, an individualistic fortress protecting one man and his little family from society at large. As Friedrich Engels argued in *Conditions of the Working Class in England in 1844*, “Everyone turns his house into a fortress to defend himself—under the protection of the law—from the depredations of his neighbours” (31).

In addition to drawing an increasingly firm line between public and private space, nineteenth-century architecture also ensured individual privacy within the home through the introduction of corridors, separate staircases, and the subdivision of houses into smaller and smaller rooms. Michael McKeon illustrates the shift from early modern to nineteenth-century architectural styles by comparing the original plan of Longleat House, which was built in Wiltshire around 1570, to its renovation in 1809. He notes that in 1570, there is little “distinction between public and private spaces” (250). All guests and residents of

the house dine together in one large hall and servants and family members inhabit the same quarters. He notes the absence of “corridors off which private rooms might be hived” and of rooms or facilities for “excretory privacy” (250). In the 1809 house, by contrast, the “the hall has ceased to function as a communal dining place for either family or servants” and servants’ living quarters are separated from those of the family. A “rectangular system of corridors and galleries . . . allows private entry to the outer rooms that feed off it” and “[f]amily members and servants alike are provided with their own sets of water closets and staircases” (250).

A Great House like Longleat is certainly not representative, and the nineteenth-century working classes were generally denied room for the architectural compartmentalization that functioned as an analogue for individuation. Engels describes the living spaces of the working classes in London as an “unplanned wilderness” (33), a nightmare version of the pre-enclosed Commons. The lack of access to privatized spaces means, for Engels, a disturbing lack of individuation: “a great many people live huddled together in a very small area” (33); “men, women and children [are] thrown together without distinction of age or sex” (35); “doors are superfluous because there is nothing worth stealing” (34); and “the worst-paid workers rub shoulders with thieves, rogues and prostitutes” (34). All are “engulfed in the morass of iniquity” (34). One family is forced to tear up a portion of their only room to use as a privy (35). Engels expresses indignation at this lack of boundaries, and argues that the intermingling of humans with one another and with animals leads to a “disgraceful squalor” in the homes of the working classes: “Hens roost on the bedposts, while dogs and

even horses sleep in the same rooms as human beings. The inevitable consequences are that the rooms are not only disgustingly filthy, but smell abominably and harbour veritable armies of vermin” (42). In Manchester, too, pig breeders are allowed to rent the courts of working class districts, “impregnating the air” with “disagreeable odour” (63). Such accounts of urban livestock clearly have much in common with Wemmick’s raising of pigs, fowl, and rabbits behind his suburban house, but Wemmick’s ownership of these animals allows him to keep them barricaded out of sight in a clearly demarcated area. Perhaps more importantly, his private ownership contributes to an illusion of self-reliance. His financial situation and membership in the middle class are precarious but, unlike the Manchester poor, Wemmick is king of his own castle. The privatization of space, linked to an individualistic sense of personal boundaries, was the preserve of the middle and upper classes.

Despite these material realities, the Victorian doctrine of three bedrooms, which dictated the importance of relegating parents and children of different sexes to separate sleeping quarters, evinces a similar architectural and ideological orientation towards subdivision and privacy, even for the working classes. In *The Dwellings of the Labouring Classes* (1850), Henry Roberts describes the ideal working-class dwelling: “The sleeping apartments, in conformity with the principle of separating the sexes, so essential to morality and decency, are generally three in number, each having its distinct access” (21). Many nineteenth-century prisons were similarly subdivided into small cells for solitary confinement, in order to protect prisoners from the moral contamination of other inmates and to provide them with a space for individual reflection upon their

crimes. Though the poor generally lived in conditions that made the individuation of private space impossible, reformists sought to cure poverty and crime by spreading the middle- and upper-class respect for boundaries to the lower orders.

The structure of the nineteenth-century buildings that ensured this respect for boundaries was inter-implicated with the architecture of the novel, a primarily middle-class phenomenon that also spread the gospel of individuation. As Philippa Tristram has argued:

[I]f houses are like stories, stories are also like houses. It is no accident that many of the terms used in critical discourse – ‘structure’, ‘aspect’, ‘outlook’, even ‘character’—are related to domestic architecture; or that the titles of so many great nineteenth-century novels were taken from the houses at their centre. (Tristram 2)

The links between nineteenth-century architectural and novelistic structures extend more specifically to the tendency to privacy and subdivision I have been tracing. Sean Grass has linked the Victorian novel’s emphasis on personal growth achieved through solitary reflection to the penal system’s reliance on the redemptive power of solitary confinement. As McKeon argues, increasingly subdivided domestic architecture was also implicated in the growing emphasis on psychological interiority in the nineteenth century, and he observes that domestic novels of the period frequently associate architectural interiors to the “deep interiority of characters” (710).

The eighteenth-century novel, by contrast, has a very different relationship to psychological and architectural interiority. As I noted earlier, Lynch and

Wahrman have argued forcefully against the idea that an individualistic view of personality dominated the eighteenth century, asserting instead that eighteenth-century people were not terribly interested in differentiating themselves from others, but rather emphasized commonalities between groups of people or the universality of character types. Tristram notes a similar logic governing the eighteenth-century novel's inattention to architectural interiors. She refers to the eighteenth-century Rule of Taste: "Just as a gentleman was defined by his likeness to other gentlemen, so a house should resemble other houses of a similar standing; it would therefore be redundant to describe what every courteous author must assume was already known to his readers" (Tristram 5). In the Victorian period, by contrast, "a true home, in the eyes of the novelists, is not defined by its likeness to other houses . . . but rather by its individuality expressed in unpretentious honesty" (Tristram 23). Over the course of the nineteenth century, domestic interiors gain literary importance alongside the psychological interiors of literary characters.

The privacy and individuality increasingly afforded by subdivided nineteenth-century houses and novels was nonetheless socially coded. Penal solitary confinement required prisoners to spend time thinking over their crimes in order to create redemptive narratives that they would recite to prison officials (Grass 8). In early nineteenth-century Palladian houses, privacy was also subject to social limitation. Private bedrooms were off limits during the day, when sociability in common rooms was an absolute requirement (Tristram 12). Inhabitants of the increasingly subdivided middle- and upper-class Victorian homes were not necessarily provided with space for solitude either. People were

segregated to particular parts of the house at particular times of the day based on their class, gender, and age, while only the patriarch of the household might be afforded his own private library or study (Tristram 59). These nineteenth-century buildings thus reflect a socially mediated style of privacy, individualism, and interiority, one that is quite similar to the individualism of many nineteenth-century novels in which individualistic bourgeois subjectivity is attainable only through integration into the social institutions of marriage, family, and work. These structures protect privacy and individuality while requiring assent to one's place in the social hierarchy. The novels I examine use both novelistic and architectural structures to represent the bourgeois identity and affect structures that are the precondition for the traumatic experiences that dismantle these deeply prized constructs. Trauma is therefore a consequence of this identity structure, and a serious challenge to it.

My first chapter, "Suffering Feminine Identity in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*" traces the shift from the eighteenth-century figuration of psychological pain as central to the construction of subjectivity to the nineteenth-century opposition between individuation and trauma. *A Simple Story* is not a trauma novel, but instead replicates and ironizes a problematic pattern in many eighteenth-century novels that premise identity on suffering. According to medical and literary theories of sensibility, women's permeable bodies make them susceptible to outside influence and dependent on masculine protection. Miss Milner's and her daughter Matilda's tears, sighs, kneeling, and fainting therefore

guarantee them access to the father's house²³ and to the kind of feminine subject position proffered by men. Yet once they begin to occupy this feminine subject position and the house that protects it, the women are denied agency and freedom, imprisoned in the house and in the identity it affords them. Even when Miss Milner transgresses her guardian/lover/husband's commands and attempts to assert independence, such transgressions lead to her suffering, and thus to a re-insertion in the socially-inscribed feminine subject position. And so, in a vicious cycle, the cure re-inflicts the disease. This pattern is not confined solely to women, however, as Lord Elmwood only agrees to house economically powerless men when they reveal a similar dependency and permeability through displays of emotional pain. In *A Simple Story*, then, suffering is central to the patriarchal construction of subjectivity and hierarchy, but Inchbald reveals the troubling implications of this dynamic. This 1791 novel thus participates in the late eighteenth-century problematization of suffering that I argue leads to the emergence of the trauma novel at the turn of the nineteenth century.

My second chapter "Traumatic Unbinding and Medical Purgation: Mary Shelley's *Matilda* as Case Study Novel" argues that, while the plot of Mary Shelley's 1820 novel *Matilda* recalls that of *A Simple Story*, it does not reflect the eighteenth-century belief that identity and suffering are mutually constitutive. *Matilda* instead marks the shift to the nineteenth-century opposition between suffering and identity, as it casts traumatic emotional pain as a major threat to

²³ I mean this phrase both literally and figuratively. Lord Elmwood grants his ward/wife Miss Milner and his daughter Matilda literal access to his house only when they behave in stereotypically feminine ways. His house functions as a symbol of the power of patriarchy both to protect and imprison women.

bounded subjectivity. However, the protagonist of this trauma novel sees individuation as a prison; for Matilda, bounded individual identity entails a level of self-control and a policing of boundaries that cut her off from the intimate connections she desires. Shelley therefore reverses the terms of *A Simple Story* to posit emotional pain as a release from identity. The novel uses claustal imagery to represent the constraints of normative individuation, echoing contemporary medical pronouncements about the dangers of the bound body. Yet while Romantic medical texts warned that shock and grief could cause physical blockages requiring medical purgation, Matilda sees her trauma as opening her up, destroying the boundaries that isolate individuals from one another. She deploys imagery gleaned from radical Romantic neurology to emphasize that her father's confession of incestuous desire communicates nervous energy to her across boundaries in a moment of traumatic psychic shock. This violation of boundaries is traumatic and destructive, but Matilda purposely keeps her wound open through a kind of *auto-vivisection* narrative. This traumatic and transgressive openness allows her to maintain a connection to her father, even after his death, and to pull her implied readers into this boundary-crossing intimacy. Matilda uses scientific language in a self-conscious way to resist both the therapeutic teleology of medical science and the educative teleology of the *bildungsroman* and marriage plots, thereby breaking apart the prison of bourgeois identity.

Matilda's Romantic valorisation of individual traumatic experience largely disappears from the Victorian novels I examine in my third and fourth chapters. In these novels, overwhelming traumatic experience signifies a violation or loss of individual identity and the inability to participate in a normative social realm, just

as it does in *Matilda*, but this loss provokes horror rather than Romantic spiritual possibility. Chapter Three, “Dangerous Retellings: Trauma and the Imprisoned Psyche in *A Tale of Two Cities*,” traces Dickens’s reliance on Victorian Associationist psychology to depict habit as a cognitive prison. In this novel, victimized characters lose the presiding Will that Victorians believed acted as a command and control centre for individual subjectivity. They become trapped in destructive emotional patterns, mindlessly repeating the violence to which they have themselves been subjected. The middle-class characters see this suffering as traumatic, as incommensurate with their identities and worldview; Dr. Manette therefore tries to hide the after-effects of his unjust imprisonment in the Bastille, internalizing and psychologizing his repetitive patterns of emotional response, and locking himself up in a prison of his own construction. The working-class characters, on the other hand, see their suffering as central to communal solidarity and identity. Their inter-subjective identities are not clearly demarcated from one another. They openly tell stories about their abuse and oppression, and ultimately re-enact it in acts of vicious political revenge. The novel reveals the dangers of both these modes. Concealing abuse and oppression, as the middle-class characters do, is psychologically isolating and politically dangerous. Nevertheless, the open sharing of violent stories and the absence of individual boundaries can lead to violent reenactments. In contrast to the progressive teleology of the *bildungsroman* and to the progressive vision of history outlined in the historical novel, as exemplified by Sir Walter Scott, history continually repeats itself in *A Tale of Two Cities*. It does so regardless of whether characters speak about their pain or keep silent. The ending of the novel therefore enacts an alternative

narrative form that opens up the potential for characters and readers to break out of the parallel prisons of bourgeois internalization and working class externalization of violence.

My fourth chapter, “Tracing Traumatic Memory in *The Woman in White*: Victorian Science and the Narrative Strategy of the Shadow-*Bildungsroman*” explores Wilkie Collins’s use of psychic shock to interrogate the assumptions about character that are central to the *bildungsroman*. On one level, this trauma novel mimics the *bildungsroman* form, but the story of Walter’s individuation and maturation is shadowed by a murkier anti-*bildungsroman* that traces the traumatic undoing of Laura’s character. In a *bildungsroman*, the social world would guarantee Laura’s individual identity, but in *The Woman in White*, Laura’s socially imposed identity is instead a prison that fragments her consciousness and renders her an automaton. Her imprisonment in a lunatic asylum under another woman’s name is simply a more melodramatic version of earlier events, such as her father’s control over her choice of marriage partner (and thus home and name) and her first husband’s literal and figurative imprisonment of her at his estate. This series of imprisonments leaves Laura a psychological wreck—cognitively impaired, amnesiac, and completely dependent on others—and her psychic doubling and fragmentation challenge the *bildungsroman*’s vision of psychological and social cohesion. Collins intensifies the horror of Laura’s situation by playing contradictory scientific and philosophical ideas about psychic shock off of one another, emphasizing the contradiction between the compulsive, dissociated, and fragmented quality of mental experience examined by these texts and the coherent, integral bourgeois self that is presented as a healthy model. Not

even science can extricate a solid identity for Laura, and the contradictory medical discourses that Collins weaves throughout the novel signal the diagnostic and therapeutic failures that darken even the novel's tidy ending. Collins's sensational depiction of Laura's situation therefore highlights the social realm's inadequate explanatory and curative structures for psychological pain and lays bare the social structures that destroy instead of protect selfhood.

This study ends in 1860, an important turning point in the development of the trauma novel and in the emergence of an explicit discourse of trauma in the later nineteenth century. The afterword briefly examines a number of developments in mid-Victorian literature, science, economics, and culture that contribute to this change. As the introduction and first chapter work to establish the particular characteristics that differentiate the early to mid-century trauma novel from eighteenth-century novels of suffering, the afterword briefly examines newer and distinct models of psychological pain and human identity that were articulated after 1860. It links Darwinian theories of evolution to the temporal models of trauma that began to dominate the late Victorian novel, even before psychoanalytic theories of traumatic memory rose to prominence. It also examines the skepticism that began to be articulated in the 1860s about atomic individualism, a skepticism that led to increased public scrutiny and government regulation of business practices. These developments prompted the formulation of an explicit medical model of nervous shock, which arose at this point in response to insurance claims against railway companies for mental injuries incurred during train accidents. In the 1860s and 70s, the fraught relationship between the bounded individual and the society that was supposed to protect its boundaries

became an object of public debate, and nervous shock became the nexus for this discussion. The early to mid-century trauma novels I examine thus culminated in a much more explicit public examination of the stakes of individualism in a bourgeois society.

CHAPTER 1

Suffering Feminine Identity in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*

Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* seems to resist internal coherence. The novel charts the maturation and romantic struggles of one young woman in the first volume, and then of her daughter in the second. Their separate stories are glued together in a somewhat awkward fashion, and the novel's tone shifts dramatically from that of a lighthearted and comic marriage plot at the beginning of the first volume to that of a dark and dreary Gothic romance in the second. Yet, despite this ostensible incoherence, *A Simple Story* does in fact reflect its title, as it is structured around the repetition of one simple tale, told over and over again. The simple story unfolds as follows. A vulnerable young person is taken in and offered protection by an authoritative older man, who grants him or her a home. This home both proffers and symbolizes a socially acceptable identity, but when the young person inevitably transgresses the boundaries delineated by the father figure, he or she falls out of the patriarch's favour and risks losing this protection. The youth suffers dramatically as a result, and this suffering, expressed through the sentimental language of tears, fainting, and illness, demonstrates the young person's powerlessness. This powerlessness pleases and reassures the patriarch, who then extends the youth protection, housing, and identity once more. This simple story occurs several times in the life of the first heroine, Miss Milner, and then again and again in the lives of her daughter, Matilda, and of Matilda's suitor, Henry Rushbrook. The repetitive loop is as inescapable as a prison; every attempt at escape demonstrates how important it is for one to remain locked up.

A Simple Story is not a trauma novel, as defined in my introduction, since it does not cast emotional pain in opposition to identity. Instead, it articulates the problematic relationship between subjectivity and suffering in many eighteenth-century gothic, sentimental, and sensibility novels. In the sentimental and sensibility traditions,²⁴ virtue is signaled by emotional sensitivity and receptiveness to pain, frequently unto death. In gothic novels, heroines are conventionally rewarded with property and marriage for grace and strength in the face of all manner of abuse. In both traditions, the suffering of disempowered characters is central to their identities and to narrative interest.²⁵ Such novels universalize virtue, emphasize shared emotional response expressed through easily identifiable gestures, and rely on static tableaux. Thus, paradoxically, the suffering women and poverty-stricken men in these novels are guaranteed socially meaningful identities within the patriarchy by exhibiting emotional responses that make them relatively interchangeable.

A Simple Story replicates this common eighteenth-century novelistic pattern. Miss Milner and Matilda repeatedly shed tears, sigh, kneel, faint, and grow ill with despair, and these displays of socially appropriate feminine suffering earn them shelter in the patriarchal households that enable feminine identity. Yet this novel

²⁴ The terms “sentimental” and “sensibility” cannot be equated, but do have much overlap. Ann Jessie Van Sant distinguishes the terms by observing that “*sensibility* is associated with the body, *sentiment* with the mind” (4). Janet Todd argues that “[b]efore Sterne used it in his title” for the 1769 novel *A Sentimental Journey*, “the noun of ‘sentimental’ was commonly ‘sentiment’ and it suggested richness in moral reflection; after his use, it tended more often to apply to sensibility and its emotional and physical manifestations, and to indicate the heart rather than the head” (9). Even before this point, sensibility, defined as physical receptivity and emotional delicacy, was important to sentimental novels like *Clarissa*, and undergirded much of their moral sentiment.

²⁵ As Samuel Johnston famously quipped, “If you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. But you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment” (Boswell 175).

traces out the disastrous implications of tying identity to emotional pain, revealing the relentless social pressure that conditions women's affective responses and highlighting the flattening of character required for patriarchal containment. Miss Milner's transgressive energies and complex character are repeatedly contained through the spectacle of feminine suffering. Each time she attempts to assert independence or ignore the commands of her guardian (and eventual husband) Dorriforth, her transgressions lead to her suffering, and thus to a re-insertion in the socially inscribed middle-class feminine subject position. She always ends up trapped in the house and in the identity it affords her, as does her daughter after her. Architectural imagery is used repeatedly in this novel to signify powerful men's closed affect structures, which they use to control and contain open and vulnerable women. The novel criticizes this relentless and repetitive containment by highlighting the way in which it quashes Miss Milner's complexity, vibrancy, and intellectual energy. She has no choice but to feel the emotions the patriarchy wants her to feel, and even though her sincere expression of emotion seems like an assertion of authentic selfhood, this expressiveness roots her firmly within conventional expectations of womanhood.

Inchbald broadens her critique by demonstrating the way in which Henry Rushbrook, an economically vulnerable young man, goes through the same pattern of transgression, suffering, and the resumption of a powerless and feminized social identity in the patriarch's house. The novel thereby exposes the way sensibility is embedded in a patriarchal system that uses economic and domestic security as a way of manipulating feelings and behaviour. *A Simple Story* thus participates in the

growing cultural suspicion of sensibility that arose in the 1790s,²⁶ exposing the way in which the doctrine of sensibility, as promulgated in sentimental and gothic novels, reproduces gender and class hierarchies.²⁷ It also participates in the new identity regime of individual uniqueness that Dror Wahrman argues emerged in the late eighteenth century. It does so not by delineating a process of maturation and discrete identity formation, as many nineteenth-century novels do, but instead by ironizing and criticizing the eighteenth-century novelistic tradition, in which sentimental emotional display confers identity by collapsing the distinctions between characters.

A Simple Story thus marks two important changes: first, the move from an eighteenth-century reliance on character types and toward a nineteenth-century privileging of unique individualism, and second, the shift from the eighteenth-century view of suffering as key to subjectivity to a nineteenth-century opposition between suffering and identity. *A Simple Story* is firmly situated in the eighteenth century's conventional attitudes to character and suffering, but its discomfort with these conventions indicates the degree to which they no longer function properly. The novel therefore elucidates the literary and social preconditions for the emergence of the nineteenth-century trauma novel, which relied upon the late

²⁶ Tobi Kozakewich also argues that “*A Simple Story* highlights the ways in which the novel of sensibility changed in the final decades of the eighteenth century, transforming itself into a genre that could make explicit the discussion of social mores implicit in many earlier sentimental novels” (160). Kozakewich’s analysis supports my contention that *A Simple Story* plays off of and critiques the sentimental tradition, but her focus on Inchbald’s exposition of the social injustice behind the plots of sensibility differs from my argument that the novel reveals the problematic dimension of the affect structures encouraged by sentimental novels.

²⁷ I do not mean to suggest that all eighteenth-century Gothic novels promote sensibility unproblematically, but rather that they make victimization and suffering central to feminine subjectivity.

eighteenth-century problematization of suffering and the emergence of individualistic forms of character development.

i. Suffering and Character in the Eighteenth-Century Novel

Critics have frequently remarked upon the important connection between suffering and character in eighteenth-century fiction, and it is this connection that Inchbald problematizes in her novel. In the eighteenth-century novel, suffering is frequently a precondition for ethical growth. In Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* (1762), the fictional tutor contends that, instead of "protecting Emile from injury, [he] would be most distressed if he were never hurt and grew up without knowing pain. To suffer is the first thing he ought to learn and the thing he will most need to know" (76). This learning process extended to the novel reading public. According to William Wandless, by the middle of the eighteenth century, a "distinctly emulative model of pain rose to prominence. Victims of affliction were set before readers as examples of responses to pain; by developing the personalities and delineating the fates of these victims, authors could countenance or denounce their patterns of behavior" (Wandless 58). For example, in *Clarissa*, Samuel Richardson juxtaposes Clarissa's virtuous and peaceful death to the rakish Bolton's anguished decline to educate the reader in "how suffering should be borne" (Wandless 62). Lovelace's rape of Clarissa does temporarily compromise her identity, and her incoherent language and brief descent into madness in its immediate aftermath demonstrate the ways in which suffering can produce psychic fragmentation. Yet, while Clarissa's suffering is intense, it is not ultimately traumatic, as I have defined the term, as she is able to turn her pain to

account, forging a virtuous identity through it.

Richardson's own comments on the novel indicate his sense of the didactic value of Clarissa's experience, and of the way her virtuous suffering elevates her character:

The case therefore is not what we should like to bear, but what (such is the Common Lot) we must bear, like it or not. And if we can be prepared by remote instances to support ourselves under real afflictions when it comes to our turn to suffer such, is the attempt an unworthy one? O that my own last hour, and the last hour of those I love, may be such as that I have drawn for my Clarissa! (*Correspondence* 228).

As Janet Todd explains, "Richardson accepted the sentimental theory that moral improvement derived from pity. So, in a letter he tells of his aim to 'soften and mend the Heart'. Since virtue could be generated through an exciting to compassion, the reader would be most improved who had been most deeply affected" (75). Readers, therefore, were trained to emulate and sympathize with Clarissa's virtuous suffering. Though Clarissa's character is unique, in the sense that she is an extraordinary model of goodness, she also functions as an ideal that readers were encouraged to copy.

Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771) exemplifies the interchangeability of suffering characters, even and perhaps especially when their identities and virtue are established through suffering. The novel is composed of a succession of sketches about a sensitive young man demonstrating his worth by crying with the weak and vulnerable members of society. These powerless and

suffering characters have been abused by authority or abandoned by loved ones, and they display their emotional purity through the expression of tender emotions. For example, Harley encounters a prostitute who has been abandoned by the worthless young man she loved. Harley takes pity on her and attempts to save her, and she is eventually reunited with her forgiving and compassionate father. Harley also encounters an elderly man who joined the army to allow his son to stay with and support his own children, and Harley witnesses the melancholy reunion of this man with his grandchildren after their father's death. The wronged innocents and gentle fathers suffer in such a way as to establish their virtue, and the man of feeling suffers with them, thereby establishing his own. The repetitiveness of these scenes establishes the virtuous identities of these characters, in opposition to the callous insensitivity of those who concern themselves only with wealth or personal advancement. Suffering, therefore, is key to character development, but it also makes good characters virtually identical. They are easily identified because they belong to the type of wronged innocence, rather than because they possess unique qualities.

Late-century gothic novels also foreground extravagant displays of female suffering, as the gothic heroine's virtue shines forth most dramatically when she is being abused. In Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, Ellena Rosalba falls in love with Vivaldi, but his mother, who disapproves of the match, spirits her away to a convent where she is told that she must either "accept the veil, or the person whom the Marchesa di Vivaldi had . . . selected for her husband" (83). Ellena instead chooses virtuous suffering, telling the abbess: "I reject each of the alternatives. I will neither condemn myself to a cloister or to . . . degradation

I am prepared to meet whatever suffering you shall inflict upon me” (84).

Ultimately her suffering is rewarded with an inheritance and the husband of her choice. As Diane Hoeveler argues, “Positioning herself as the deserving and innocent victim of oppression, malice, and fraud, the female gothic heroine exchanges her suffering for money and a man” (Hoeveler 18). The gothic heroine fashions an identity and a place in society by proving her virtue in the face of victimization, which, as Hoeveler wryly notes, is not so different from proving her virtue by her victimization.

Despite the centrality of this suffering, Hoeveler argues that the gothic heroine proves her virtue not, as in the sentimental novel, through dramatic displays of emotion, but instead through her “extreme control of her emotions” (40). Ellena Rosalba, for instance, is “satisfied with herself, because she had never, for an instant, forgotten her own dignity so far, as to degenerate into the vehemence of passion, or to falter with the weakness of fear She knew that she must suffer, and she resolved to endure” (84). In an almost identical fashion, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily St. Aubert repeatedly attempts to “restrain” (100, 192), “overc[o]me” (137) and “conceal” (176) her tears. Claudia Johnson therefore asserts that Radcliffe’s female protagonists “shoulder the once-masculine virtues of stoic rationalism and self-control” (16). Though these texts relocate virtue in the repression rather than the expression of emotional pain, they nonetheless continue to signify virtue according to a schema of character types, differentiated by appropriate and inappropriate responses to suffering.

Radcliffe’s 1790 novel *A Sicilian Romance* (which, unlike *The Italian* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, was published before *A Simple Story*) puts far less

emphasis on feminine emotional discipline and instead promotes emotional expression, much like in the sensibility tradition. When the heroine Julia is pressured to marry a man she does not love, she uses somatic language to express horror at her mistreatment:

Julia, who had hung weeping upon [her father's] knees, fell prostrate upon the floor. The violence of the fall completed the effect of her distress, and she fainted. In this state she remained a considerable time. When she recovered her senses, the recollection of her calamity burst upon her mind with a force that almost again overwhelmed her. She at length raised herself from the ground, and moved towards her own apartment, but had scarcely reached the great gallery, when Hippolitus entered it. Her trembling limbs would no longer support her; she caught at a bannister to save herself; and Hippolitus, with all his speed, was scarcely in time to prevent her falling. The pale distress exhibited in her countenance terrified him, and he anxiously enquired concerning it. She could answer him only with her tears, which she found it impossible to suppress (56)

The spectacle of her suffering draws her closer to Hippolitus, the worthy young man whom she will eventually marry, and there is no sign of the self-regulating gothic heroine here. While Julia is at one point “saved . . . from fainting,” it is only by her own “flood of tears” (60), as one bodily symptom substitutes for another. Like the more controlled gothic heroines that follow her, Julia is rewarded after much suffering with a companionate marriage and economic security, but she does not have to repress her emotions and, indeed, is loved more

deeply and recognized as more virtuous because of them. *A Simple Story* is, therefore, in line with sentimental novels, such as *Clarissa*, and with the early gothic tradition, exemplified by *A Sicilian Romance*, in the links it draws between feminine identity and the display of suffering. As I argue below, displays of suffering, rather than their repression, serve as the basis for female identity in *A Simple Story*. However, as I also argue, by highlighting the protective imprisonment necessitated by the emotionally permeable feminine identity, and by emphasizing the way it flattens out character, the novel contributes to the suspicion of sensibility that more forcefully characterized Radcliffe's novels of the 1790s as well as the nineteenth-century trauma novels that followed.

ii. Sensibility and the *Homo Clausus*: The Open and Closed Self in the Eighteenth Century

The doctrine of sensibility that underwrote the sentimental and gothic traditions conceived of emotion in terms of permeability, the ability to be moved and impressed by the outside world. This theory reflects the porous and shifting models of selfhood that Wahrmann argues dominated eighteenth-century culture, and contrasts with the new identity regime that came to dominate in the nineteenth century and which emphasized atomized selfhood. The doctrine of sensibility rose to prominence in the mid-eighteenth century, along with the neurological model of affective response.²⁸ Older models of emotional experience pictured “the passions”

²⁸ Van Sant argues against simplistic causation, however, noting that “in order to describe the minute physical structures of the nervous system, physiologists adopted a vocabulary of refinement that was standard in the culture” (3).

residing within the human body. According to early modern humoral theories, the passions continually threaten to rise up from below, but the higher order animal spirits should, ideally, be able to keep them in check. In *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting*, Joseph Roach explains this model: “the plebeian humours, generally sluggish when properly kept down, become dangerous when they rise in revolt, while the animal spirits, quintessential Tories—subtle, sensitive, well-connected—try to run everything” (40). According to the doctrine of sensibility, by contrast, the passions do not dwell inside a person. Instead, one’s nerves are more or less attuned to the external impressions that generate feeling.²⁹ Neurology thus externalized the source of emotion, and experiences were now understood to play on the nerves as a musician plays on the strings of a sensitive musical instrument. In his *Treatise on Human Nature*, David Hume argues that “if we consider the human mind, we shall observe, that, with regard to the passions, it . . . resembles a string-instrument, where, after each stroke, the vibrations still retain some sound, which gradually and insensibly decays” (140). Roach notes that the vibrating nerve model was used to clarify how a feeling could remain after its stimulus had been removed (105). This analogy explained away the apparent disconnect between external impressions and internal response, thus better making the case for the body’s responsiveness to the outer world.³⁰

²⁹ Yet as Van Sant points out, “in popular thinking, the coexistence of numerous physical and physiological systems was the rule. Animal spirits, corpuscles, nerves, and humours could operate together” (8).

³⁰ It is important to note that Hume continues to rely on the theory of “the passions,” however, and that his model does not involve a simple transmission of feeling from one body to another. As Amy M. Schmitter explains, in Hume’s writing, sympathy “is a causal mechanism, whereby we come to feel the passions we suppose others feel. In its simplest form, it starts with an observation of the outward signs of a passion in another . . . from which we form an idea of . . . the

As I argued earlier, within the literary culture of the mid-eighteenth century, one's ability to be moved emotionally in this way and to be receptive to the feelings of others became a source of character and sign of virtue. A permeable boundary between self and other became desirable, and emotional susceptibility came to be associated with a refined rather than animalistic temperament. George Drinka traces this association between emotional susceptibility and refinement to the early eighteenth century physician George Cheyne's invention of "the myth of the Angelic invalid," a "delicate member of the better classes" who "inherits delicate nerves from her or his forebears" (Drinka 33). Emotion was no longer associated primarily with the disruptive or unruly lower orders, which were increasingly depicted as insensate. This emotional receptivity was also, at least initially, not confined to women. George Cheyne created the image of the angelic invalid in part to describe his own emotional and physical susceptibility, though sensibility became increasingly gendered over the course of the century.

Despite the cultural value attached to emotional impressibility, eighteenth-century medical literature frequently warned about the dangerous effects of overstimulation of the nerves. For example, in his 1746 treatise *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of those Disorders which have been Commonly called Nervous, Hypochondriac, or Hysteric*, Robert Whytt asserts that "by sudden terror, delicate women and children have not only been thrown into fainting and convulsions, but rendered subject all their lifetime to epileptic fits" (213). Drinka

existence of some passion. Sympathy vivifies that idea into an impression, that is, a passion, by borrowing from the ever-present, and lively sense of self."

explains this assertion by arguing that Whytt believed that a “frightening sound or vision speeds through the eye and ear into the nervous system and, in the delicate human, stirs up the whole body and leads to outbreaks of generalized nervous symptoms” (36). Such permeable bodies are intensely vulnerable to assault from external stimuli.

Whytt also cautions against the dangerous effects of a sympathetic disposition. As “there is a remarkable sympathy, by means of the nerves, between the various parts of the body,” he explains that there is also “a still more wonderful sympathy between the nervous systems of different persons, whence various motions and morbid symptoms are often transferred from one to another” (219). As Hume explains it, “As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature” (575). Emotions thus become contagious, and a person of acute sympathy might catch another’s feelings as he or she might catch a cold. This openness to the outside world, though a sign of refinement, delicacy, and virtue, could also make one weak, sick, or mad.³¹

In the wake of the French Revolution, these fears of sympathetic contagion took on political overtones. Shared emotional response came to be linked to French mass revolutionary violence, and the impressionable and sensitive feminine body was identified with domestic and political disorder. As

³¹ For an analysis of the parallel development of this paradox in eighteenth-century novels and medicine, see John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*.

Gary Kelly argues, “the pre-Revolutionary feminized culture of sensibility was increasingly denounced during the 1790s as a source of Revolutionary transgression and insubordination” (“Women Novelists” 373). Virtuous chastity was no longer the logical extension of an ennobling feminine sensibility; sensibility was instead increasingly sexualized. According to Candace Ward, the belief in women’s “more pervious” nervous systems underscored their sexual susceptibility and thus their moral and social disruptiveness (1). Shared emotion, impressibility, and physical responsiveness were reimagined as threats to domestic and political stability.³²

This context may clarify why *A Simple Story*, published in 1791 at the height of the French Revolution, begins by emphasizing and seeming to promote an alternative to sensibility: Dorriforth’s disciplined, impermeable, and somewhat insensible masculine affect structure. Dorriforth does sometimes show signs of a “sensibility unexpected” (107), and Ward contends that, in the first half of the novel, he is a man of feeling who belongs to the “feminized world” of emotions (10).³³ Yet from the very beginning of the novel, Inchbald emphasizes

³² Both radicals and conservatives became increasingly suspicious of sensibility, and warned, variously, that it could feminize men, infantilize women, weaken the health, relax social morality, romanticize an oppressive political system, and lead to political instability. For an examination of the wide range of British critiques of sensibility in the 1790s, see Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*. For analysis of the ambivalent and often contradictory attitudes to sensibility in texts by women such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, see C.J. Barker-Benfield’s *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*.

³³ This view of Dorriforth then requires a radical transition when he becomes Lord Elmwood and “sheds his sensibility” for a more traditionally masculine posture (Ward 11). Other critics also see Elmwood’s harsh behaviour in the second half of the novel as radically different from his gentleness in the first half. Jo Alyson Parker goes as far as to argue that “Dorriforth and Sandford undergo changes that defy credibility or defy what we have come to expect in regards to character consistency” (264). Yet, in the first half of the novel, Dorriforth’s extreme self-regulation and his banishment of a sister who offends him for marrying the wrong man are consistent with the tyranny he later exerts. His self-cloistering behaviour becomes only much more extreme, not

Dorriforth's self-regulated and bounded subjectivity far more forcefully than any other characteristic. Although he is a Roman Catholic priest, he "refused to shelter himself from the temptations of the layman by the walls of a cloister, but sought for, and found that shelter in the centre of London, where he dwelt, in his own prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance" (3). Inchbald's strange phrasing makes it seem as though Dorriforth lives "in" his own good character, in his house of self-control. He has no need for the cloister walls, or for the Catholic priesthood's externally imposed regimen; he has internalized its discipline and has become a *homo clausus*.

Norbert Elias uses this term "*homo clausus*" (472) to describe a particular affect structure that had arisen by the eighteenth century in Western Europe. Elias contends that a "civilizing process" transformed "the whole drive and affect economy" of European society from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century and beyond (374). He traces a growing sense of boundaries between individuals and a corresponding "advance in the threshold of shame" as restrictions on relieving oneself, passing wind, blowing one's nose, and spitting arose and became increasingly more strict (451). Elias provides copious examples from a range of early modern conduct books. The Wernigerode Court Regulations of 1570, for instance, include the exhortation not to "relieve oneself without shame or reserve in front of ladies," while the Brunswick Court Regulations of 1589 specify that it is improper to "foul the staircases, corridors or closets with urine or other filth" (qtd. in Elias 111, 111-12). In his *Galateo*, Della Casa also very helpfully advises his sixteenth-century readers that, "when coming across

radically different.

something disgusting in the street,” it is not polite to point it out or “to hold out the stinking thing for the other to smell” (qtd. in Elias 111).

By the late eighteenth century, most of these prohibitions had become so internalized as to become unmentionable. A very different affect structure underlies LaSalle’s pronouncement in his 1774 *Les Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne* that “it is never proper to speak of . . . certain bodily necessities to which nature has subjected us, or even to mention them” (qtd. in Elias 113). Elias also traces the eighteenth-century shift from a courtly emphasis on manners to a middle class concern with “virtue,” in particular with “the fences surrounding the sexual sphere of libidinal life” (433). In *A Simple Story*, Dorriforth’s bounded subjectivity implies this rigid morality, emotional control, and sexual chastity, in addition to the refined manners and concealment of bodily functions that Elias argues characterized the early modern civilizing process.

This series of changes, the growth of an “invisible wall of affects” (60), underlies what Elias calls the “*homo clausus*,” the bounded individual who feels that his or her true self “is something locked away ‘inside’ them, severed from all other people and things ‘outside’” (475), as Dorriforth is cloistered in his own self-discipline. Hence, Elias argues, the “self in a case” becomes “one of the recurrent *leitmotifs* of modern philosophy, from the thinking subject of Descartes, Leibniz’s windowless monads, and the Kantian subject of knowledge (who from his aprioristic shell can never quite break through to the ‘thing in itself’)” (475). Although Wahrmann argues that, for most of the eighteenth century, British people were still relatively comfortable with porous or mutable models of identity, by late century, the bounded “self in a case” came to dominate.

Elias takes very little account of the late eighteenth-century doctrine of sensibility in his analysis, but in *The Culture of Sensibility*, G.J. Barker-Benfield uses Elias's theoretical framework to understand the eighteenth-century British campaign for the reformation of manners, a movement that promoted refined sensibility and rejected masculine brutality, drunkenness, and libertinism (37-103). According to Barker-Benfield, sensibility culture was part of the "civilizing process" Elias outlines (78-82). While this connection is certainly valid, Barker-Benfield does not consider the contradiction between the bounded subjectivity of Elias's *homo clausus* and the scientific assumption of permeability undergirding the doctrine of sensibility. In contrast to Elias's narrative of the rising "wall of affects" in the eighteenth century, the cult of sensibility seems to have promoted the open rather than the closed personality, as the man or woman of sensibility is particularly receptive to others' feelings, which play almost directly upon his or her nerves.

Though they cannot be easily equated, I argue that there was a mutually constitutive relationship between the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility and the "civilizing process," between the man or (more commonly) woman of feeling and the *homo clausus*. My investigation of *A Simple Story* reveals that the belief in a sensible, permeable affect structure justified the need for controlled manners and closely guarded virtue. A person of delicate sensibilities is susceptible to sympathetic contagion from the destructive immorality or passions of those around them, easily disturbed by breaches of good conduct, since his or her nerves are so responsive. For instance, in 1790, Johann Kaspar Lavater describes women's physiology as "easily wounded, sensible, and receptive" (15). He warns that "this light texture of their fibres and organs . . . render[s] them so easy to conduct and

to tempt” and that “the irritability of their nerves” and “their extreme sensibility” can lead them to become “irreclaimable” (15-6). The implication of this belief system is that others must therefore closely regulate their own behaviour, mind their manners and control their emotions, in order not to cause harm. If the person of delicate sensibilities has a more permeable boundary than others do, then he or she must be sheltered by those who can offer better defences, and in particular by the refined yet strong men whose feelings are tempered by self-control. In the work of Adam Smith, “refined males showed their ‘amazing superiority’ to ‘the weak’ by their degree of ‘self-command’” (Barker-Benfield 140). As *A Simple Story* demonstrates, sensibility does not break apart the house of bounded selfhood; it necessitates admitting the defenseless into one’s house and then shutting the door.³⁴ Such a process precludes the possibility that the defenseless could build their own house or craft their own identity; they must be locked up in a social identity created for them and for their own good.

iii. Patriarchal Containment and the Sentimental and Gothic Modes

Inchbald uses her female characters’ reliance on Dorriforth to house them to represent the way vulnerable eighteenth-century women were considered incapable of self-cloistering discipline, and hence in need of masculine protection and moral guidance.³⁵ This spatial and architectural imagery runs throughout the

³⁴ This differentiation could distinguish the eighteenth-century sensibility tradition from the emotional volatility of Romanticism, which in the works of William Blake, Emily Brontë, Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, or Percy Shelley, might indeed break apart the house of bounded subjectivity.

³⁵ Valerie Henitiuk also traces some of the connections between gender and spatial imagery

text and signifies the boundaries of identity that only economically powerful men are able to maintain, and which they use to protect and control vulnerable members of their household. As I argued in the introduction to this dissertation, personal property and individuation were linked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Robert P. Marzec highlights the importance of the Enclosure Acts to eighteenth-century novels, which link “identity maturation” to “gaining a legal right to the land” (132). In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the borders of individual identity were increasingly symbolized and maintained by domestic architecture, which drew firm lines between public and private space and ensured privacy through the introduction of corridors and separate staircases. The *homo clausus* was able to maintain a firm sense of personal boundaries, then, largely because he owned his own house.

Homes operate symbolically throughout *A Simple Story*, linked not only to the power of patriarchy but also to the borders of the *homo clausus*. As I noted above, Dorriforth avoids the Roman Catholic cloister of jointly held property and lives instead “in” his “prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance” (3). Before he inherits his estate and title, he does live in Mrs. Horton’s house, but he is nonetheless responsible for ensuring Mrs. Horton’s and Miss Woodley’s physical and social well-being. It is only because of Dorriforth’s money that they can continue living in this home, and though he is only a tenant, he has control over their space and is solely responsible for setting the moral tone in their household:

. . . they regarded him with all that respect and reverence which the

in the novel, but she uses Arnold Van Gennep’s concept of liminality as a lens through which to read Matilda’s experiences in Part II of the novel as a “rite of passage” (41).

most religious flock shews to its pastor; and his friendly society they not only esteemed a spiritual, but a temporal advantage, as the liberal stipend he allowed for his apartments and board enabled them to continue in the large and commodious house, where they had resided during the life of Mr. Horton. (7)

Dorriforth's balanced combination of moral guidance and friendliness is reflected in the "large and commodious house" he allows the women to enjoy.

When Mr. Milner appoints Dorriforth as his daughter's guardian, he is hoping for this very balance, which he too expresses with architectural imagery. He worries that if he leaves his daughter to the wrong people, "in the cold nipping frost of disappointment, sickness, or connubial strife, they will forsake the *house* of care, although the *house* which they themselves may have built" (4, emphasis mine). He imagines that Dorriforth, by contrast, "will protect without controlling, instruct without tyrannizing, comfort without flattering, and perhaps in time make good by choice rather than by constraint, the dear object of his dying friend's sole care" (5). He wants Dorriforth to house his daughter, but also to give her room to move. Dorriforth takes this responsibility very seriously: "his politeness would sometimes appear even like the result of a system he had marked out for himself, as the only means to keep his ward restrained within the same limitations" (23). The protection and identity a man can offer women is repeatedly rendered in spatial terms, expressed here through a vocabulary of geographical limitations and marks that delineate what is appropriately "within" the standards of acceptable behaviour. Dorriforth builds a house of his own self discipline and invites women to live in it with him.

Yet Miss Milner has a “quick sensibility” and has never received any education in restraint (15). Her witty outbursts and her frequent desire to go out function as parallel transgressions of the cloistered domestic identity Dorriforth constructs for her. Dorriforth literally cannot keep her in the house, and outside the house she acts without sexual propriety as a flirt and coquette. As a result, Dorriforth’s household and his calm self-possession are thrown into turmoil: “sleep had been disturbed by fears for her safety while abroad; morning after morning, it had been broken by the clamour of her return” (27). When Dorriforth reaches the end of his patience with Miss Milner’s gallivanting, he attempts to establish boundaries by commanding her not to leave the house one evening (29). She responds with “surprise, which fixed her hand on the door she had half opened, but which now she shewed herself irresolute whether to open wide in defiance, or to shut submissive” (29). This command is only a test, however, and once Miss Milner defers to his authority, he relents, absorbing all her transgressive energies by ordering her to go out: “Once more shew your submission by obeying me a second time today.—Keep your appointment, and be assured I shall issue my commands with greater circumspection for the future, as I find how strictly they are complied with” (33). He rewards her for internalizing his control, yet Miss Milner continues to push against his authority. The biggest test of her obedience to him is played out when he forbids her to attend a masquerade, and she replies with an ominous accuracy: “nothing, *unless she was locked up*, should alter the resolution she had taken, of being there” (153; emphasis mine). She leaves the house without his permission, dressed, as her maid later says, “in men’s cloaths” (159); her transgressive freedom is a kind of

drag.

Because Miss Milner does not easily accept the domestic identity that can be granted her by the protection of a self-disciplined man, her identity seems elusive and fragmented; no one knows quite what to make of her. Before Miss Milner joins Dorriforth's household, he hears conflicting reports of her character. One woman describes her as "a young, idle, indiscreet, giddy girl, with half a dozen lovers in her suite; some coxcombs, some men of gallantry, some single, and some married" (9-10), while another bursts into tears at the mere mention of Miss Milner's name, and tells a tale of her selfless charity (11-12). Her behaviour is governed by her varying emotional impulses and therefore seems incoherent. When she defies Dorriforth's commands and attends the masquerade, she dresses as "the goddess of Chastity," but her alluring costume, like her insistence on attending the masquerade at all, gives her "the appearance of a female much less virtuous" (155). As Eleanor Ty argues, "This equivocal habit demonstrates her refusal to conform to the most common stereotypes of women; in it she is neither angel nor whore, neither the Virgin Mother nor the temptress witch figure" (93). Miss Milner thus fragments her social identity by transgressing the boundaries established in the patriarchal home.

The masquerade all but disappeared from English society in the 1780s and 90s, and Wahrman links its decline to the increasing emphasis placed on stable and unified identity in the late eighteenth century (162). Again, according to Wahrman, the "*ancien régime*" of mutable and shifting character was replaced in the late-eighteenth century by a new identity regime that emphasized character stability and coherence. Miss Milner's fondness for the masquerade and comfort with self-

contradiction therefore associate her with this earlier tradition. Indeed, at the beginning of the novel, this witty, flirtatious, and performative character seems to have stepped off the comedic Restoration stage.³⁶ She parries with her male suitors and adversaries, uses her wits, charm, and beauty to carve out agency for herself, and even dresses in revealing and eroticized men's clothes, as though playing a breeches role.³⁷ Though Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy relied on character types, it nonetheless frequently located a woman's charm in her contradictory energies and unpredictability, rather than in the static and easily readable virtue of the sensibility tradition.

The formulaic and easily readable style of characterization in gothic and sentimental novels contrasts not only with the Restoration comedies that preceded it, but also with newer styles of characterization that emerged in the early nineteenth century. Deidre Lynch has studied the question of why 'round' and 'dynamic' characters,³⁸ like Jane Austen's protagonists, came to dominate the novelistic tradition at this point. She argues that interiority emerged in the early nineteenth century as a readerly effect, as the novel-reading public increasingly strove to

³⁶ For a detailed analysis of the novel's connection to the comedic tradition, see Hye-Soo Lee's "Women, Comedy and *A Simple Story*." Lee argues that Miss Milner recalls "the strong heroines in comedy, such as Rosalind (*As You Like It*), Millamant (*The Way of the World*), or Hellena (*The Rover*), who possess defiant spirits, feel ardent love, and command witty, subversive language" (198).

³⁷ Though Inchbald associates these Restoration comedic motifs with Miss Milner's transgressive freedom, breeches roles did not offer an uncomplicated route to power for Restoration actresses. For a summary of scholarly analyses of the breeches role as exploitive to women, see Kirsten Pullan, *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society* (48-9). Pullan claims that "Though contemporary theories of cross-dressing and transvestitism both on and off the stage suggest that the cross-dressed female assumes masculine privilege, Restoration breeches roles are generally understood as reinforcing sexual stereotypes" (48). Nonetheless, Pullan argues that they provided actresses with "a (limited) subject position" (49).

³⁸ This differentiation of "round" from "flat" and "dynamic" from "static" characters originates with E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*.

differentiate themselves from one another through their ability to interpret the inner lives of literary characters. Lynch emphasizes the way in which Austen and earlier turn-of-the-century authors produce this effect by allowing the reader privileged access to the inner lives of protagonists who are misunderstood by other characters (151-2). While Miss Milner's dynamic and performative unpredictability aligns with the Restoration tradition, the novel also details her inner struggles with desire and morality, struggles other characters frequently do not understand. Inchbald repeatedly stages conflicts between the reader's knowledge of Miss Milner's inner state, such as her love for Dorriforth, and other characters' misreading of her behaviour as signs of affection for other men or of fickleness. Miss Milner's transgressive energies therefore seem like a throwback to the Restoration tradition, while her depths of interiority anticipate the nineteenth-century novel. Both these modes of characterization, however, sit uncomfortably with the static and flat characterization of the sensibility and gothic traditions. Over the course of *A Simple Story*, Miss Milner's depths and contradictions, her energy and uniqueness, disappear each time she suffers, only to return again whenever she once more tests the limits of Dorriforth's authority. In these scenes of suffering, she and her daughter are thrust into sentimental and gothic modes that corral their characters into well-defined domestic spaces and erase their distinction from one another.³⁹

³⁹ As Peter Mortenson argues

If the first part of *A Simple Story* borrows paraphernalia (such as the much-discussed masquerade scene) from Restoration comedy and eighteenth-century satire, the second part incorporates conventional elements culled from the Gothic romance and melodrama. For example, Inchbald changes her protagonist's name from the realistic 'Miss Milner' to the romantic 'Matilda', a

Over the course of the first volume, Dorriforth begins to develop hints of Gothic tyranny, and so always seems on the verge of locking Miss Milner up. This dynamic only intensifies once he becomes Lord Elmwood and gets his own castle. In response, Miss Milner tries to force him to recognize the way in which she exceeds the bounds of the space he has delineated for her. Hoeveler has pointed out that “Female gothic novelists . . . did not so much create ‘masculine’ characters as ‘masculine’ spaces; that is, they constructed spaces that they saw as defined, codified, and institutionalized as ‘masculine’ which they then attempted to rewrite into the literature more benignly as ‘feminine’” (xii). Miss Milner attempts to rewrite Dorriforth’s masculine spaces not only as more *benignly* but also as more *openly* feminine, but the text enacts her dramatic failure to do so. Miss Milner’s country house represents the threat that feminine spaces pose to patriarchal control. When Dorriforth first decides to remove her there, Dorriforth’s confessor and father figure, Sandford, proclaims to Miss Milner, “I shall never enter a house where you are the mistress” (44). He breaks this resolution only when he sees the house in chaos. Miss Milner’s paramour Lord Frederick relocates to the neighbourhood of her house and Miss Milner’s indiscretions with him, combined with Lord Frederick’s inappropriately familiar behaviour towards her, prompt Dorriforth to react impulsively and violently; he strikes Lord Frederick and then must agree to a duel, which contravenes his religious vows.⁴⁰ Miss Milner’s feminine space clearly does not represent or

perennial favourite among Gothic romancers from Horace Walpole to Matthew Lewis. (365)

Though Lewis’ *The Monk* had not yet been written, Mortenson’s larger point stands.

⁴⁰ Barker-Benfield contends that “The history of the pressure against dueling, a facet of the

encourage the self-discipline of the *homo clausus*.

This erotic intrigue and the resulting duel associate Miss Milner's house and her particular brand of excess with the aristocratic values that increasingly came under fire from a professionalizing middle class in the late eighteenth century. The public power of courtly women frequently served as a focal point for this middle-class critique and for the assertion of the value of domesticated, bourgeois femininity. As Kelly has argued,

‘female politics’, were seen as part of the court system of intrigue and patronage, in which women used their sexual desirability and erotic skills to achieve power not available to them by ‘legitimate’ means. This image of courtly woman was widely diffused through society and led to a middle-class construction of ‘domestic woman’ naturally restricted to the domestic sphere for her own good, the good of her family, and the good of the nation. (*Women, Writing* 7)

Sandford therefore enters Miss Milner's feminine, aristocratic, and disordered household to “[pour] upon [Dorriforth] a torrent of rebukes” (66), in an attempt to re-establish domestic order. Sandford tries to banish the flirtation and duelling, the sexual and violent excess that Miss Milner has inflicted upon the household. In his own miniature campaign for the reformation of manners, Sandford tries to seal off the household by reminding Dorriforth of his earlier self-control and rigid adherence to vows.

Ward argues that because Dorriforth is a man of sensibility, he is horrified

eighteenth-century's campaign for the reformation of manners, also illustrates Elias's theories” (80).

by his behavior after he strikes Frederick, and calls himself a “brute,” thus “underscor[ing] his affinity for the feminized, that is, private and interior, spaces in Inchbald’s novel” (10). Yet the chaos of this feminine space is what engenders his brutish behaviour. Miss Milner’s house is not private or interior; it is transgressively open and representative of the kind of unbounded subjectivity that would allow for flashes of emotional violence to burst free from control. Dorriforth is horrified by his brutish behaviour because he has lost control of his emotions, not because he has not been sufficiently emotional.

While Dorriforth does not fully give in to Sandford’s demands, he appeases him and makes clear that he has reassumed his own self-regulation. He decides to accept but not give fire in the duel, thereby preserving both his own honour and his sense of his duty as a Catholic priest. He accepts Sandford’s masculine and fatherly authority while also asserting his own. Dorriforth thereby becomes more firmly a figure of masculine bourgeois self-control; in navigating between the traditional authority of the Church and aristocratic honour culture, he affirms his own autonomy.⁴¹ After this incident, Sandford becomes comfortable in Miss Milner’s house because she is severely reprimanded and loses all power over this space. She suffers emotionally and falls to her knees before Dorriforth, “never

⁴¹ The central irony here is that Dorriforth is soon to become the aristocratic Lord Elmwood. Dorriforth’s aristocratic embodiment of middle-class values is part of the process of what Kelly calls the “*embourgeoisement* of the economic and cultural institution of the landed estate” and of the middle-class aim to “professionalize the dominant classes and form a coalition with them” (*Women, Writing* 16, 4). In addition to undergoing an *embourgeoisement*, throughout the novel, Dorriforth is also subject to Protestantization. Though Inchbald was herself Roman Catholic, Roger Manvell and Catherine Craft-Fairchild have both pointed out that Dorriforth does not behave like the Jesuit priest he is: “Dorriforth, living alone under his own management, seems absolved from the vow of obedience, while he dispenses with that of poverty” (Craft-Fairchild 85). This freedom does not make him a transgressive figure, however, and only more thoroughly emphasizes his internalization of discipline.

desiring to rise more” (69). She confesses, “I am weak, I am volatile, I am indiscreet” (69), while Sandford gloats over her “triumphantly” (69). Tobi Kozakewich argues that “Miss Milner’s figurative self-flagellation and her potential martyrdom . . . preclude a reading of her as completely corrupt” (165). As in a novel of sensibility, her suffering is therefore a sign of her virtue and of her status as heroine. However, Inchbald emphasizes the way in which Miss Milner’s suffering erases the uniqueness in her character and functions to disempower her completely. Terry Castle has argued that “Female energy, in Inchbald’s vision, has the power to transform space” (295). But each and every time Miss Milner transgresses, she feels the way in which she has disappointed Dorriforth, whom she has grown to love, and thus suffers for her disobedience. Like a heroine from the sensibility tradition the novel relies upon, she falls into sickness, sheds tears, faints, and prostrates herself in sorrow and guilt. In this dramatic display of misery, she regains Dorriforth’s affection but Sandford triumphs over her, and she is no longer mistress in her own house.⁴²

Indeed, this kind of suffering is connected throughout the novel to properly feminine and submissive identity, and is even a prerequisite for entrance into the masculine household. The first time Miss Milner enters Dorriforth’s house, “she burst[s] into a flood of tears, kne[els] down to him for a moment, and promise[s] ever to obey him as her father” (13). Critics frequently read these charged scenes as eruptions of natural emotion that exceeds the bounds of

⁴² Her loss of control over this house is reinforced later in the novel. After she flees her husband’s house after her adultery, she does not return to her own country seat, which of course now legally belongs to her husband, but instead to a desolate Scottish cottage.

civilized restraint. For Ward, “Miss Milner’s body language—the language of sensibility—*does* speak more truly than her words” (6). For Nora Nachumi, “bodies express emotions more authentically than words do alone” (80). Kelly contends that “gesture is the most ‘natural’ and the most telling language” in the novel, and “since words are the language of the super-ego, only gestures can elude the censorship of conscience to tell the story of the heart’s imprisonment” (*English Jacobin* 86).⁴³

However, these scenes of suffering and submission may also be read as highly ritualized performances of Miss Milner’s socially coded femininity, rather than examples of nature breaking through restraint. This interpretation would ally the novel with what Hoeveler calls “gothic feminism,” “an ideology of female power through pretended and staged weakness” (7). Miss Milner’s expressions of emotion are highly theatrical and she does frequently get the intimacy and shelter she desires whenever she engages in this kind of emotional display. So, does the novel present her suffering as authentic, or staged for a purpose? Is it a natural, instinctive feeling, or a response to cultural expectations?

On the one hand, Miss Milner’s emotional expression is stylized and theatrical, but on the other, the novel’s third-person narrator tells the reader that Miss Milner truly feels the emotions she displays. We therefore have no reason to doubt Miss Milner’s authenticity, especially since her emotions frequently overtake her in private and since she sometimes struggles to hide them when other

⁴³ In a similar vein of criticism on sensibility in *A Simple Story*, Ildiko Csengai contends that “At a time when openly expressing emotions that related to sexuality was one of the greatest prohibitions affecting women, the discourse of sensibility came to function as a socially acceptable form of expression, a legitimate channel into which forbidden, repressed affects could be diverted” (3).

characters are present. In my reading, these scenes articulate an emotional reality that challenges the polarization of authenticity and performativity. Miss Milner's suffering is both very real *and* a response to her cultural situation. Her culture gives her no choice but to feel what she does, as Inchbald demonstrates time and again the way in which these feelings are reinforced by Miss Milner's friends and family. In order to enter the house, she must assume a gendered subject position and, in a world that privileges erotic and familial sensibility for women, very particular feelings must emerge; they are the only feelings Miss Milner could possibly have and express in her situation.

In addition to seeing these bodily displays of emotion as natural, Nachumi also argues that they are empowering, that they provide a "a limited degree of agency within a society organized around patriarchal forms of authority" (99). However, these scenes of suffering are far too reassuring to powerful men to represent any substantive challenge to patriarchy.⁴⁴ As I noted earlier, at the beginning of the novel, Dorriforth is concerned by the contradictory reports he hears of Miss Milner's character, but her display of emotion as she enters his house touches him deeply and he is immediately reassured as to her moral character. Not all feminine emotion functions in this reassuring way, however. When Miss Milner responds to one of Sandford's insults with anger, Sandford

⁴⁴ Ward similarly observes that Dorriforth is most attracted to Miss Milner when she engages in the "spectacle of submission" common to the literature of sensibility and when she is "awed by his power" (8). Though she does discuss Miss Milner's sickness and weakness, Ward does not focus primarily on the way in which submission and awe are expressed through suffering, but instead on Miss Milner's passivity, shame, and timidity, and on the way in which such passivity transforms her from sexual subject to object.

reacts with “fear” and the ensuing “dead silence was nearly as alarming to Sandford as her rage had been” (125). When he “saw a flood of tears pouring down her face,” though, he “heaved a sigh of content” (125), as order is once again re-established through her suffering. Although feminine suffering provokes masculine protectiveness and care in the novel, it does so only by emphasizing and thus reinforcing women’s powerlessness. Inchbald therefore casts the modality of female power that we associate with the sentimental and gothic genres as illusory.

The scenes of suffering also provide an opportunity for the men in the novel to prove their worth, by showing that they can be softened by and have pity for feminine weakness, but this dynamic is not empowering to the female characters. As Elizabeth Dolan has argued, “the man of sensibility’s affective responses to the suffering of the poor, the insane, and the women he encounters direct the reader’s attention less to these sufferers than to the male viewers’ own capacity to feel” (12).⁴⁵ In many of the scenes of female suffering in *A Simple Story*, the focus is on the softening resolve and barely repressed emotional responses of Elmwood and Sandford, but Inchbald mimics this dynamic from the sentimental novel in order to highlight the disturbing quality of the masculine fetishization of feminine suffering and weakness.

After one of Miss Milner’s many transgressions, Dorriforth is drawn to her because her fright and guilt make her appear thin and pale:

When she arrived at the study door, she opened it with a

⁴⁵ Claudia Johnson also argues that “under sentimentality, the prestige of suffering belongs to men” (17).

trepidation she could hardly account for, and entered to Dorriforth the altered woman she has been represented. His heart had taken the most decided part against her, and his face assumed the most severe aspect of reproach; when her appearance gave an instantaneous change to *his* whole mind, and countenance. . . . Instead of the warmth with which he was prepared to begin, his voice involuntarily softened, and without knowing what he said, he began,

‘My dear Miss Milner’— (50)

Miss Milner’s appearance changes Dorriforth’s whole mind; as in Whytt and Hume, emotions seem like they might be contagious. Yet the emotional dynamic between the characters is more complex than one of contagion. Dorriforth does not actually share Miss Milner’s emotions in this scene. He does not become weak or frightened. Instead, her weakness and trepidation are signs of her need for masculine guidance and protection. Dorriforth’s whole mind changes when he reads these signs, and he adopts a protective attitude towards her in response. Miss Milner’s suffering once again grants her a particular place in the household and re-establishes its order.

This pattern repeats itself over and over again in the first half of the novel, and is in fact its primary structuring device. To provide just a few examples, once Elmwood has despaired of his own ability to control and house Miss Milner and has decided to marry her to a respectable man who can do so more effectively, she angers him again by refusing various offers of marriage. In the aftermath, she lapses into a “melancholy humour,” but this “sedateness of manners” is a mode of

behaviour “she knew her guardian admired,” one which he later “thought fit to mention, and applaud” (109). Later in the novel, when Miss Milner begins to suffer seriously at the thought that, after leaving the priesthood, Elmwood might marry someone else, the two bond over her inability to eat:

the moment she carried a piece to her lips, she laid it on her plate again, and turned paler, from the vain endeavour to force her appetite. Lord Elmwood had ever been attentive to her, but now he watched her as he would a child; and when he saw by her struggles she could not eat, he took her plate from her; gave her something else; and all with a care and watchfulness in his looks, as if he had been a tender-hearted boy, and she his darling bird, the loss of which, would embitter all the joy of his holidays. (134)

In this comparison between the suffering Miss Milner and a child or pet, Inchbald highlights the erotic allure of her powerlessness.⁴⁶ Of course, many eighteenth-century readers would likely approve of Elmwood’s treatment of Miss Milner. Dorriforth begins by treating her like a child, but a paternal dimension in romantic relationships was not necessarily problematic in the eighteenth century. Indeed, Inchbald even tempers this inequality by comparing Dorriforth to a “tender boy,” implying that he is as vulnerable as a child himself. Yet sensibility transforms into parody over the course of this one sentence; Inchbald upends the pleasurable

⁴⁶ Later in the text, Rushbrook sees feminine suffering as a merit, and is drawn to Matilda because she suffers: “it is she—her merit which inspires my desire of being known to her—it is her sufferings, her innocence, her beauty” (297). He is aware of his confusion of love and pity, and admits “I love Lady Matilda—or, unacquainted with love, perhaps it is only pity—and if so, pity is the most pleasing passion that ever possessed a human heart, and I would not change it for all her father’s estates” (315).

feelings she initially provokes by sardonically comparing Dorriforth to a little boy whose holidays would be ruined if his bird died. By paralleling the romantic energy that fuels this novel to a child's intense, but short-lived attachment to a pet, Inchbald ironizes Dorriforth's love and implies that it is childish and selfish. These scenes in particular parody the benevolent patriarch of sentimental fiction by presenting his sympathy as a sadistic game.⁴⁷

In contrast, Castle presents *A Simple Story* as a utopian fantasy in which "The heroine's desires repeatedly triumph over masculine prerogative; familial, religious, and psychic patterns of male domination collapse in the face of her persistent will to liberty" (292). She traces out the novel's "obsessive pattern of proscription/violation/reward" (323) as Miss Milner's and her daughter's transgressions repeatedly lead to ecstatic reunions with their object of desire. She does not, however, take into account the feminine suffering and powerlessness that act as catalysts for such reunions. I argue that the central pattern in the novel is that feminine transgression leads to abject suffering, and this suffering, rather than transgression, is rewarded with love. Although Castle does not deny that Miss Milner suffers, she does not emphasize this step. She links the transgression directly to the reward that follows, and de-emphasizes the suffering that must first occur. Although I agree with Castle that the novel allies the reader's sympathies with Miss Milner each time she triumphs over Dorriforth's anger or reserve, the suffering she must first endure flattens her character and negates her power. As I argue throughout this chapter, *A Simple Story* ironizes the eighteenth-century

⁴⁷ As George Haggerty argues, Inchbald "cuts through the tenets of sensibility which paint the father as a superior being endowed with saintly grace" (657).

novelistic convention of making suffering central to female subjectivity, and Castle's focus on the temporary liberation afforded by Miss Milner's transgressive acts, without an equal attention to their consequences, sidelines this important aspect of the novel.

In the wake of Miss Milner's transgressive attendance at the masquerade, which leads to a break between her and Elmwood, Miss Milner recognizes the loss of power attendant on her displays of suffering, and so insists that "instead of stooping to him, I wait in the certain expectation, of his submission to me" (173). She tries to hide her feelings, but when she leaves to cry alone in a hidden corner of the house and Elmwood stumbles upon her, "Pride was the first emotion his presence inspired—pride, which arose from the humility into which she was plunged" (180). Inchbald makes very clear that suffering and tears are signs of the submissive feminine subject position. Because suffering highlights women's powerlessness, it becomes, paradoxically, the only form of power they are allowed. As Miss Milner's daughter says later in the novel, "there is a sort of humiliation in the grief to which I am doomed, that ought surely to be treated with the highest degree of delicacy by my friends" (303). Matilda believes she deserves respect because her suffering humiliates her. Miss Milner is aware of this double bind, but can find no escape from it.

Indeed, it is only by suffering that Miss Milner is able to regain Elmwood's love and keep him from leaving the house they have been sharing. When Elmwood is about to leave for an extended stay in Europe, she comes downstairs "dead white" with "scarce strength to hold" her cup of tea, which she "nearly drop[s]" when she hears the carriage (189). Like one of Radcliffe's later

gothic heroines, she tries to keep her emotions under control, but when she is “unable to suppress her tears as heretofore, [she] suffer[s] them to fall in torrents” (190). At first Sandford seems angry, but then offers to marry Lord Elmwood to Miss Milner, urging him to “this moment constrain her by such ties from offending you, she shall not *dare* to violate” (191). In this scene, Miss Milner is rewarded with love for her sentimental display. Because she proves herself incapable of emotional self-control, she provokes masculine constraint and protectiveness. Lord Elmwood asks whether, once they are married, she will “show . . . that tender love you have not shown me yet?” (191), and “by the tears with which she bathed his hands, [she] gave him confidence” (192). Miss Milner’s pain and tears give Elmwood and Sandford hope that the marriage bond will constrain Miss Milner’s transgressive and contradictory energies because they mark her as properly feminine and “tender,” thus requiring male protection.

They are wrong, however, about the effectiveness of these ties to bind her, but significantly, Lady Elmwood’s adulterous affair happens when her husband has been absent from their house for several years, when he is dealing with his property in the West Indies. Unlike a self-regulating, late-gothic heroine, self-command continues to elude Lady Elmwood. Without Lord Elmwood home to contain her, she is unprotected from the influence and attentions of others. Her adulterous affair is, of course, a sign of her own lack of self-regulation, but it is also a sign of her husband’s neglect of her. By staying away for years and not telling his wife about the illness that delays him, he provides her with insufficient masculine protection for her sensible and impressible nature, for the emotionally

responsive affect structure that he had helped to cultivate.⁴⁸ She cannot self-regulate because her fatherly husband only ever showed her love when she succumbed to her emotions and then allowed him to regulate her. This final transgression is, however, too severe to be made up to Lord Elmwood with dramatic suffering, so when he is about to return home, Lady Elmwood “[flees] his house, never again to return to a habitation where he was the master” (197). In doing so, she leaves behind the social identity, respectability, and protection he afforded her.

The pattern by which transgression leads to suffering and humiliation, which in turn provoke masculine approval and domestic containment, is nonetheless renewed in the second half of the novel. Lady Elmwood tries to assure her daughter a respectable identity by leaving her under Lord Elmwood’s protection, but he becomes implacable and closes himself off completely from human connection. Barker-Benfield sees Elmwood “returning to his willful shell after [his wife’s] adultery” as a “reversion to” the “masculine culture” that predated the eighteenth-century campaign for the reformation of manners and the related culture of sensibility. However, the novel does not articulate a simple opposition between a traditional masculine culture of violence, excess, and hardness and a new feminized culture of refinement, sensibility and openness. Instead, the novel demonstrates that the culture of feminine sensibility requires a masculine hardness to protect it, and that both the sensibility and the hardness can

⁴⁸ As Kozakewich notes, “without either husband, father or guardian to temper her sensibility, Miss Milner ultimately succumbs to an affair” (165).

slip into violent excess.⁴⁹ Both Lord and Lady Elmwood succumb to these excesses. Lord Elmwood therefore closes himself off completely. He sends Matilda away “as the perpetual outcast of [her] father” (197), denying her access to the father’s house and the social identity it affords. Nevertheless, Sandford, the novel’s other *homo clausus*, grows to love Matilda *because* she suffers: “Lady Matilda[’s] . . . forlorn state, and innocent sufferings had ever excited his compassion in the extremest degree, and had caused him ever to treat her with the utmost affection, tenderness, and respect” (216). Lady Elmwood’s virtuous suffering also wins her Sandford’s love and respect, and he accompanies them to a desolate cottage, becoming their new masculine protector.

Lady Elmwood’s suffering ultimately redeems her by giving her a virtuous identity in death and assuring her daughter a place in her father’s home. Her contradictory and transgressive energies completely disappear in the second half of the novel; she is redeemed by her transformation into a character type, indistinguishable from countless other repentant and dying fallen women. Though Lady Elmwood has transgressed too seriously ever to be let back into her husband’s house, she believes that suffering and a virtuous death will let her access the house of God the father. In a deathbed letter to her husband in which she begs him to take Matilda under his protection, she alludes to the biblical story of the prodigal son, “the unfortunate child in the scripture (a lesson I have

⁴⁹ Barker-Benfield implies that Elmwood’s retreat into this shell is linked to his violent duel with Lord Frederick in that they both belong to the earlier masculine model. While I agree that the duel clearly emerges from earlier codes, Elmwood’s retreat into his shell does not signify his reversion to the heartless rakishness of a Lovelace or Mr. B, but instead represents a hardening of the cloistered, self-controlled subjectivity that Dorriforth displays in the first half of the novel and that characterizes Elias’s emergent *homo clausus*.

studied)” and places her faith in the “distant hope” of these lines of scripture “being fulfilled” (211). She thereby ties her own hope that God will accept her into heaven to her daughter’s hope that Lord Elmwood will accept her into Elmwood Castle. In the second volume of the novel, then, suffering continues to be the prerequisite for entrance to the Father’s house. Women’s suffering is key to their identity formation, which can only be recognized and asserted through the patriarchal homes that protect women’s status.

In order to allay Elmwood’s resentment as she asks him to take Matilda into his home, Lady Elmwood asks him to remember her suffering, “the anxious moments I have known, and what has been their end” (211), and also to imagine her dead body: “Behold *me*, also— . . . My whole frame is motionless—my heart beats no more.—Look at my horrid habitation, too,—and ask yourself—whether I am an object of resentment?” (211-212). As Ward notes, she “thrust[s] herself ‘bodily’ before his mind’s eye” (12). Lady Elmwood calls attention to the way in which she is now housed in her grave, defined forever by her suffering. In doing so, she makes Elmwood pity her and want her to be more suitably housed. He asks if she was buried with her father, and when he hears she was not, he is saddened by the news. She has suffered virtuously for years and, though her husband still deeply resents her, he wants to see her in a proper space, returned to the house of her father, and not alone in some “horrid habitation.”⁵⁰ Even in death,

⁵⁰ Kozakewich claims that the novel “implies that there is no possibility for posthumous resuscitation of a woman who has fallen victim to the susceptibility immanent in such a sensibility” (166). Although there is some truth to this assertion, Lady Elmwood’s virtuous suffering does redeem her in the eyes of Sandford and gain Matilda a place in her father’s house. The memory of Miss Milner’s kindness to Rushbrook also inspires his love of Matilda, and so her virtue does, in some ways, live on and direct the plot in the second half of the novel.

Lady Elmwood's identity is dependent upon whether she is housed with and by her earthly and spiritual fathers. Here and elsewhere in the novel, this housing is only granted as a reward for the suffering that signifies women's permeability, weakness, and need for masculine protection.

At this point, the novel shifts more dramatically into the Gothic mode, as Elmwood essentially buries his daughter alive with him in his house, just as he wished his own wife had been buried with her father. He accepts her into his home, along with Miss Woodley, but under a bizarre and tyrannical series of prohibitions designed to prevent him from ever seeing Matilda, in order to protect himself from the pain that their meeting might cause:

their retired apartments . . . were detached from the other part of the house by a gallery; and of the door leading to the gallery they had a key to impede any one from passing that way, without first ringing a bell; to answer which, was the sole employment of a servant who was placed there during his lordship's residence, lest by any accident he might chance to come near that unfrequented part of the house; on which occasion the man was to give immediate notice to his lady. (224)

Matilda has very little freedom, and is forced to take "short and anxious walks . . . while Lord Elmwood dined, or before he rose in a morning" (233). This separation of male and female spheres, and the seclusion of women within one particular part of the household operates something like a dark parody of a Turkish harem. Elmwood establishes a more formidable system of control over Matilda than he had over her mother, because in secluding her from himself, he

excludes her from society and from the social identity that only a masculine protector can provide, all while essentially imprisoning her in his house.

Matilda is nonetheless amazed at the beauty of Elmwood Castle and at her father's power and status: "'And is *my father* the master of this house?' she cried" (219). Sandford's reply hints at the status and identity she gains by being allowed in the house, but also at its limitations: "And you are the mistress of it now, till your father arrives" (219). Under the statutes that Elmwood has established, even a chance encounter will lead to her exile, because she might remind Elmwood of her mother and thus the pain her mother caused him. He wants to be an independent *homo clausus*, protected from suffering and from the intimacy that can bring it about, and he builds this impermeability by imprisoning his daughter in the domestic space. Elmwood's self-command depends upon his separation from and control over Matilda, and over the feminized emotional vulnerability she represents for him.

Though ostensibly the good and obedient daughterly contrast to her transgressive mother,⁵¹ Matilda fantasizes about transgressing the barriers her father has set up between them. Just as her mother had been consumed with transgressive desire for social and erotic adventure, Matilda is obsessively curious about and attracted to her father. She stares at his portrait⁵² and fantasizes a

⁵¹ As Parker puts it, "she is the good daughter, the female who may chafe against unfair restrictions but who will leave it to the male himself to recognize their unfairness" (264).

⁵² Alison Conway argues that, in staring at this portrait, Matilda "appropriate[s], momentarily, the position of power enjoyed by her father in her assumption of spectatorial control" (204). Although "Matilda assumes a conventionally feminine posture before the portrait, weeping and sighing," she nonetheless "reveals a stubborn tenacity in her willingness to stand for hours," a tenacity Conway argues "produces a paradoxically aggressive masochism that aims at the father's seduction" (204).

scenario in which “She would rush boldly into the apartment where he was, and at his feet take leave of him for ever.—She would lay hold of his hands, clasp his knees, provoke him to spurn her, which would be joy in comparison to this cruel indifference” (244).

When the inevitable does happen and they encounter one another, she risks being cast out due to her accidental transgression. She staggers in fear, and like Julia in *A Sicilian Romance*, “putting out her trembling hands to catch the balustrades on the stairs for support—misse[s] them—and [falls] motionless” (Inchbald 274). Yet, while Julia is caught by a lover who offers the support denied by her father, *A Simple Story* conflates lover and father as Matilda falls “into her father’s arms” (273-4). By flailing at the useless balustrades, Matilda communicates the inappropriateness of the physical house as a metonymic substitute for the support and protection of the father it should merely represent.

Once Elmwood finds Matilda in his arms, he is touched by her vulnerability: “he still held her there—gazed on her attentively—and once pressed her to his bosom” (274). He is initially drawn in by her need for him: “when her eyes opened and she uttered, ‘Save me.’—Her voice unmanned him.—His long-restrained tears now burst forth—and seeing her relapsing into the swoon again, he cried out eagerly to recall her” (274). Her display of weakness temporarily softens Elmwood; in a moment of sympathetic contagion, he joins her in her misery and tears spring to his eyes. The borders of personality and gender falter; Elmwood is “unmanned” and then calls his daughter by his wife’s name: “Miss Milner—Dear Miss Milner” (274). The relationship between Matilda and her father is therefore vaguely incestuous, as had been the relationship between

Elmwood and his ward/wife Miss Milner. Matilda thus repeats her mother's pattern, as her transgression leads to her suffering, which then re-establishes her inferior position, permeability, need for protection, and status within the patriarchal household. Though Matilda experiences a major shock at this moment, her suffering is not traumatic (as defined in my introduction) because it more firmly establishes her identity.

Yet once Elmwood realizes that one of the servants has witnessed his own descent into a feminized permeability, he exiles his daughter from his household (274, 277). It is no longer enough to lock the weak feminine inside the masculine house of self control; she must remain completely out of sight and repressed from his consciousness in order for the patriarch to maintain his *own* self-command. I have argued throughout this chapter that *A Simple Story* is not a trauma novel because it does not posit suffering in opposition to identity, but I have built this case upon an analysis of Miss Milner and Matilda, the characters through whom the majority of the novel is focalized. An argument could be made that Lord Elmwood's suffering in this scene is traumatic, however, as I have defined the term in my introduction. Unlike the economically powerless Miss Milner and Matilda, Lord Elmwood's identity is as a *homo clausus*, a self in a case, and so the kind of suffering he experiences in this stairwell scene does temporarily challenge the boundaries of his identity. Unlike earlier scenes, the suffering he experiences in this moment threatens the emotional barriers he builds around himself, which are the source of his self-concept and social identity as a powerful, disciplined, and rational man. This shocking moment is therefore potentially traumatic. As I argue in the rest of this dissertation, the nineteenth-century novel extends Lord

Elmwood's discrete, bounded model of subjectivity beyond propertied males to all bourgeois subjects, thus making the trauma that challenges this form of identity far more central.

The forbidden stairwell meeting between Elmwood and Matilda thus signifies a serious transgression of the borders of individuation, borders that were increasingly both symbolized and maintained by domestic architecture in the eighteenth century. Philippa Tristram notes that, at this point, "Family privacy was . . . increased by the provision of back stairs, so that the master of the house on his main stairway might not meet his 'last night's faeces coming down them'" (38). This is precisely how Elmwood views his stairway meeting with his daughter. Elmwood cannot face Matilda because she is a product of his own excretions, a visible sign of his physical and emotional porousness. The emotions she provokes, as well as her very existence, challenge the mental fiction of the *homo clausus*. Elmwood therefore asks his servant to cast her out. The servant does so quietly and out of his master's eyesight, as he would clean a chamber pot.

Of course, Matilda's social identity falters when she is no longer protected by the barriers of her father's house. Consequently, she is abducted almost immediately by a rapist, her former suitor Lord Margrave. Margrave tells Sandford that "the discarded daughter of Lord Elmwood cannot expect the same proposals which I made while she was acknowledged, and under the protection of her father" (301). Unhoused by her father, she is left vulnerable to identity construction imposed by another man, who would transform her from *dutiful daughter* into *mistress*. In his attempt to impose this identity on Matilda, Margrave shuts her inside his own house in a grotesque parody of her father's

behaviour. He abducts her to his house “in the lonely part of a well-known forest” and locks her up in “a most superb apartment” with a more nefarious version of Miss Woodley, “one of his lordship’s confidential females placed to attend upon her” (326). Her position here resembles that of Isabella and Matilda from *The Castle of Otranto*, Ellena Rosalba from *The Italian*, and countless other Gothic heroines, who are violently and sexually threatened by menacing father figures.⁵³ In *A Simple Story*, too, the rapist and father are uncannily doubled. Lord Elmwood’s emotional arousal, first by his wife’s and then by his daughter’s suffering, is not so different from the Gothic rapist becoming further impassioned by the cries and suffering of his intended victim.⁵⁴

It is only when Elmwood realizes that Lord Margrave threatens to house Matilda in the identity he chooses for her as rape victim and illicit mistress that Lord Elmwood “prove[s] . . . a father” (324) and violently recovers Matilda. Susan Allen Ford asserts that “Only this challenge to Lord Elmwood’s legal

⁵³ In Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, the menacing patriarch Manfred develops a sudden passion for his son’s fiancée Isabella, moments after his own son is killed. He hunts this daughter figure down, but when he stabs her violently in a fit of passion, he realizes that he has accidentally killed his own daughter, Matilda. In Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, the priest Schedoni is hired to abduct and kill Ellena Rosalba. When he is on the verge of stabbing her, after brushing her clothing aside in an erotically suggestive manner, he notices a locket containing what seems to be his own portrait, thus identifying him as her long lost father. Though he turns out only to be her uncle, the confusion between rapist and father is nonetheless significant.

⁵⁴ For example, in Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk*, Antonio schemes to rape Antonia, whom he later discovers is his sister. Antonia’s terror, shrieks and “alarm . . . seemed only to inflame the Monk’s desires” (383). He takes advantage of her supplication at his feet, “clasp[s] her to his bosom, almost lifeless with terror” and rapes her (383-4). Though *The Monk* was written after *A Simple Story*, Barker-Benfield traces a similar pattern in *Clarissa*:

Clarissa was up against the real horror: not a man who read her signs of weakness as power and desisted and, moreover, was then converted by them to the fantasy of deferential, sentimental husbandhood. Instead, Lovelace enjoyed Clarissa’s tears and her distraction, her symptoms of virtuous distress, before he drugged and raped her. The power of a woman’s weakness was revealed as fantasy, in contrast to the reality of a man’s power. (34)

possession of his daughter can energize his interest in emotionally reclaiming her” (52). When Elmwood bursts into Margrave’s house, Matilda at first thinks Margrave has orchestrated the noise and that “this tumult was some experiment to intimidate her into submission” (328). Though she is mistaken about Lord Margrave, the incident illustrates how the patriarchal “protection racket” (Hoeveler xi) ensures women’s submission. Matilda “[wrings] her hands, and lift[s] up her eyes to heaven in the last agony of despair” (328). Her father then rescues her and, “with the unrestrained fondness of a parent, fold[s] her in his arms” (328). She is afraid to speak or respond, and so “falling on her knees clung round his legs, and bathed his feet with her tears.—These were the happiest moments she had ever known—perhaps the happiest *he* had ever known” (329). The happiest moment of both of their lives involves her sobbing, prostrate at his feet, after almost being raped.

The happiness in this scene is, of course, tied up with the intensity of Matilda’s relief; Matilda’s father has finally allowed himself to love her, and he comes to her rescue just in the nick of time. That said, this scene also replicates and exaggerates the pattern of suffering leading to patriarchal acceptance that is repeated and ironized throughout the rest of the novel, and it therefore contributes to Inchbald’s problematization of the patriarchal control of feminine identity. The relief inspired by this scene is tempered by its familiarity; the pattern seems inescapable, and Matilda is therefore still metaphorically locked up. She regains access to her father’s house by being victimized and by repeating almost perfectly the gestures of her grief-stricken mother when *she* first entered Dorriforth’s home. Sighs, tears, kneeling, and fainting—those visible signs of feminine sensibility

and suffering, of their weakness and need for masculine protection—provide these heroines with an identity and a place within the father's household, a space that, though beautiful and well-decorated, nonetheless imprisons like a Gothic castle. Though this identity and home can be threatened by feminine transgression, such energies are inevitably reabsorbed through the feminine suffering that results and that contains women in a submissive role.

Inchbald subsumes her feminist critique of the inevitability of a woman's containment within a broader representation of the workings of patriarchy by demonstrating that economically vulnerable men are subject to the very same pattern as the imprisoned and subjugated daughters-of-the-house. Elmwood's nephew Rushbrook is made his heir after Matilda and her mother are cast off, but Rushbrook transgresses Elmwood's authority by falling in love with the sequestered and tabooed Matilda. Inchbald again renders the transgression in spatial terms when Rushbrook secretly crosses the barrier into Matilda's apartments, "rudely intrud[ing] into Lady Matilda's presence" (253). During a discussion in which Elmwood tries to force Rushbrook to marry someone else and probes him for information about the state of his heart, Elmwood commands Rushbrook to name the person with whom he has fallen in love. Though Elmwood draws firm boundaries around his own interiority, he grants his dependents no privacy or inwardness. Yet since Elmwood has prohibited anyone from mentioning either Matilda or her mother in his presence, Rushbrook cannot speak to his uncle about his love. Caught between defying Elmwood by naming Matilda, or defying him by remaining silent, Rushbrook delays, promising to examine his heart and reveal all in time (253). Elmwood then reacts to him

exactly as he reacted to Miss Milner in the past. When Rushbrook shows signs of “fear, powerfully (but with proper manliness) expressed,” Elmwood is “softened” and, “pitying his nephew’s sensibility,” grants him a reprieve of a week (254). During that week, Rushbrook’s emotional distress causes him to become ill, thus provoking his otherwise tyrannical uncle’s care and compassion. In the midst of his fever, Rushbrook asks Elmwood if he can tell him everything when he is well again, “let it be what it will” (255). Elmwood answers with a hasty “‘Yes, yes,’ as a child is answered for its quiet” (255). This infantilizing and feminizing sensibility-fever affords Rushbrook six months’ reprieve before Elmwood once again begins to pressure him to marry.

When Elmwood finally does reassert his desire that Rushbrook marry, Rushbrook reminds Elmwood of his promise, and violates the linguistic taboo by confessing his love for Matilda. Elmwood responds by exiling Rushbrook and, by implication, disinheriting him, taking away his social identity and economic security. In response, a “shower of tears cover[s] [Rushbrook’s] face” and he “sob[s] like a boy” (291, 292). Sandford therefore pleads on his behalf: “He is but a boy, my lord, and do not give him the punishment of a man. . . . Do take this young man from the depth of despair in which I see he is sunk, and say you pardon him” (291, 292). The pattern is by now familiar. Rushbrook transgresses, and then suffers from the very thought of losing the love and protection of the patriarch, which is also a loss of his financial position, social status, and identity. His suffering humbles and infantilizes him, and thus communicates his lack of power. Sandford reconciles the two, placating the patriarch by highlighting Rushbrook’s lack of power, just as he did when he encouraged Elmwood to marry

the vulnerable and emotionally distraught Miss Milner.

As we see, Rushbrook is both the delicate ‘man of feeling’ who proves his worth by being moved by Matilda’s suffering, and the feminized Gothic hero, terrorized by the threatening patriarch but offering a more hopeful alternative for the Gothic heroine. Yet in *A Simple Story*, the happy ending is not brought about by the tyrant’s defeat, and so the hero and heroine are still bound to his rules. The novel therefore mimics the eighteenth-century novelistic genres of sentimentality and gothicism in order to elucidate and critique the relationship between suffering and subjectivity that they engender. Inchbald demonstrates that the economically vulnerable woman *or* man must suffer in order to attain a socially sanctioned identity, but she also makes this familiar pattern uncomfortable; she denies her readers the satisfaction that can arise from generic familiarity by emphasizing Elmwood’s sadism and by highlighting the vibrancy and energy that are lost when suffering characters become repetitive and interchangeable doubles of one another.

iv. An Education in Adversity

I have focused throughout this chapter on the novel’s ironization of the sensibility and gothic traditions, but in its denouement, *A Simple Story* also makes passing reference to the *bildungsroman* or novel of development. Suffering is also central to this tradition since, in the *bildungsroman*, “negation, alienation, and pain constitute the detour which, it so happens, is the route of progress” (O’Regan 52). In her analysis of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century female *bildungsroman*, Lorna Ellis argues that “bildungsroman Heroines” achieve an

understanding of “social constructions of self . . . only after much pain” (90). *A Simple Story* signals a tenuous connection to this tradition with its seemingly disconnected, tacked-on ending that contrasts “the pernicious effects of an improper education in the destiny which attended the unthinking Miss Milner” with the “school of prudence, though of adversity, in which Matilda was bred” (337, 338). This school of prudence and adversity is presumably what allows Matilda to gain recognition by her father, and thus an identity and place within the social fabric, making her worthy of the agency she is granted when her father allows her to decide whether or not to marry Rushbrook at the end of the novel. As in the *bildungsroman*, it seems as though Matilda’s proper formation heals the breach between individual self-determination and social harmony.

But to what extent does this healing proceed from Matilda’s prudence? She is prudent in the sense that she never openly challenges her father. Nonetheless, she still is expelled from her father’s house for the accidental transgression of meeting him in a stairwell. And her choices have very little to do with her positive situation at the end of the novel. It is in fact her victimization when she is abducted and almost raped that heals the breach between father and daughter. *A Simple Story* highlights this troubling dimension of feminine suffering in the novel, and the way in which it runs contrary to the *bildungsroman* plot, which focuses on the mental development of protagonists who need a highly developed sense of self and of morality to make decisions about their lives.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Lee also argues that “*A Simple Story* ideologically and aesthetically deviates from a dominant female literary tradition in the eighteenth century: the didactic tradition of reformed heroines” (211).

Matilda has no such agency and therefore requires no such education. As Susan Fraiman has argued, female novels of development frequently “imply that the disreputable gothic novel may account more plausibly for the passage to bourgeois womanhood than the classic *Bildungsroman*” (10).

Mary Wollstonecraft criticized *A Simple Story* for not emphasizing the positive effects of Matilda’s education. In a 1791 article in *The Analytical Review*, she faults the novel for not making the contrast between the educations and characters of Miss Milner and Matilda sufficiently pronounced:

Educated in adversity [Matilda] should have learned (to prove that a cultivated mind is a real advantage) how to bear, nay, rise above her misfortunes, instead of suffering her health to be undermined by the trials of her patience, which ought to have strengthened her understanding. Why do all female writers, even when they display their abilities, . . . poison the minds of their own sex, by strengthening a male prejudice that makes women systematically weak? (101-2)⁵⁶

In other words, Wollstonecraft wanted the novel to function properly as a female *bildungsroman*. Yet Inchbald suggests that a solid female education only means learning how to suffer, and this suffering blurs the distinctions between women rather than distinguishing them from one another. Unlike nineteenth-century novels, which value the interiority and uniqueness of female protagonists and which posit suffering as a traumatic violation of the boundaries of identity, *A*

⁵⁶ While this review is unsigned, most scholars attribute it to Wollstonecraft, who is listed as one of the contributors to the *Analytical Review*. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler include this review in their edition of Wollstonecraft’s *Works*.

Simple Story makes suffering foundational to a generalized and easily readable feminine identity. Because Matilda suffers dramatically in a way that demonstrates her dependence on men, she is rewarded with the protection of her father. He also gives her the choice of whether or not to accept Rushbrook's proposal of marriage, giving her what seems to be some agency and control over her life. And yet, Elmwood's completely unpredictable tyranny does not bode well for domestic harmony should she refuse to marry Rushbrook and continue to remain under her father's protection. As Patricia Meyers Spacks has argued, "she knows enough not to want too much" (200). The choice she is granted is really no choice at all.⁵⁷

The novel therefore ironizes sentimental and gothic novels, both of which make suffering central to female identity. It also demonstrates the impossibility of fitting a woman's life story into the pattern of the *bildungsroman*, since suffering and self-abnegation are the only things women can learn in order to integrate into their societies. Indeed, by identifying the power dynamics at work in both women's and economically dependent men's displays of suffering, and by charting the way that suffering transforms characters from vibrant and unpredictable individuals into interchangeable types, Inchbald negates the value of a subjectivity based in emotional pain.

⁵⁷ Fraiman has argued that, in contrast to the "willful self-making" of the heroes of the masculine *bildungsroman*, heroines in the novel of development "have a clearer sense that formation is foisted upon them, that they are largely what other people, what the world, will make of them" (6). In a similar vein, Craft-Fairchild insists that "The final paragraphs of Inchbald's novel implicate the 'PROPER EDUCATION' of woman . . . as one intended to suppress female desire" (116).

CHAPTER 2

Traumatic Unbinding and Medical Purgation: Mary Shelley's *Matilda* as Case Study Novel

In the wake of the late-eighteenth-century interrogation of sensibility culture and the rise of a model of discrete individual selfhood, British novels increasingly established an opposition between mental anguish and socially integrated identity. As I noted in my introduction, many canonical nineteenth-century novels, including *Sense and Sensibility*, *Jane Eyre*, and *David Copperfield*, present emotional pain as something that must be overcome as part of the process of identity-formation and social harmonization. In contrast, the trauma novels with which I am concerned evince an interest in psychologically damaging events that are resistant to moralization, aestheticization, and interpellation in the process of *bildung*. They introduce trauma as an unnamed category of experience that emerges from, while also challenging, the spirit of ameliorative and socially integrated individualism upon which much of the emergent novelistic tradition relies.

In her 1820 novel *Matilda*,⁵⁸ Mary Shelley reworks the plot of *A Simple Story* in ways that reflect changing attitudes to suffering. Like her namesake in *A Simple Story*, Shelley's Matilda loses her mother and is abandoned by her father until her teenage years. Like Lord Elmwood, Matilda's deeply wounded father

⁵⁸ Mary Shelley's spelling of her heroine's name is inconsistent, so I have chosen to follow editors Janet Todd and Pamela Clemit's use of "Matilda" rather than "Mathilda." Many scholars prefer the alternate spelling, but in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, Clemit justifies her choice as follows: "although the heroine's name is spelled 'Mathilda' in rough draft and fair copy, Mary Shelley in her published remarks refers to the work's title as 'Matilda', so this spelling is adopted here" (2).

sees his teenaged daughter as a replication of her dead mother and causes her serious psychological harm.⁵⁹ Shelley makes the incestuous undertones of *A Simple Story* shockingly explicit, however, as the father confesses desire for his daughter and then commits suicide when she rejects him. Unlike Miss Milner and Matilda in *A Simple Story*, the anguish of Shelley's protagonist does not bring her into the patriarchal fold, nor does it give her a ready-made (if problematic) feminine subject position. Instead, Matilda's trauma shatters her identity and sense of personal boundaries, while also exiling her from the community of comforters to whom she cannot confess her unspeakable secret. Her suffering is traumatic not only because of how intensely it shocks and shatters her, but also because it cannot be shaped into an easily comprehensible narrative for others. She rejects the literary plots that could integrate her suffering within larger patterns of meaning, and instead structures her tale as a medicalized case study in the physical and mental effects of incurable shock. She writes the first-person tale that constitutes the novel on her deathbed, only once it has no chance of bringing her into a network of sociability that might allow her to heal.

Before her death, Matilda's distress does make her attractive to a gentle and educative would-be suitor Woodville, to whom she later addresses her tale. The poet Woodville's story recalls the tropes of sentimental fiction – a narrative mode, nevertheless, incompatible with Matilda's more tortured story. Before meeting Matilda, Woodville falls in love with the sweet and beautiful Elinor, who

⁵⁹ Susan Allen Ford also sees a strong connection between *Matilda* and *A Simple Story*, arguing that “these fictions of father-daughter incest . . . share a plot powered by forbidden desire, a characteristic definition—and then redefinition—of both daughter and father, a significantly absent mother, and a rhetoric of incest that develops through spatialization as well as through the suppression of speech” (51).

sickens and dies before they can marry. Despite this loss, he is uplifted by Elinor's goodness in life and in death. Unlike Matilda, he has a "natural grief, not to destroy but to purify the heart" (191),⁶⁰ and is in the process of grieving gently and poetically when he meets Matilda. Unlike Woodville's purifying grief, Matilda's trauma has rendered her peevish, ill, and desperate for death. When set against Woodville's sweetly melancholic tale, Matilda's story of unnatural desire, suicide, and guilt emerges as darker and more unmanageable.⁶¹

Matilda rejects what she sees as Woodville's desire to economize her suffering within a literary tradition that would make it coherent:

I am, I thought, a tragedy; a character that he comes to see act: now and then he gives me my cue that I may make a speech more to his purpose: perhaps he is already planning a poem in which I am to figure. I am a farce and play to him, but to me this is all dreary reality: he takes all the profit and I bear all the burthen. (199)

Despite this insistence on "dreary reality," in both the time-frame of the discourse and the time-frame of the story, Matilda sees her life as a story and her choices as a series of possible plots. Her response to Woodville's aestheticization of her is to maintain firm control over her own tale. When contemplating suicide, she

⁶⁰ Critical editions of *Matilda* are included in Oxford's *Mary Shelley Reader* and Pickering and Chatto's *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*. Since there are no stand-alone critical editions of the text, scholars cite a variety of different editions. I follow Diane Hoeveler, Lauren Gillingham, and others in citing the Penguin edition, edited by Janet Todd. All references are to this text.

⁶¹ The novel's allusions to painting operate in a similar manner, recalling aestheticized depictions of female suffering only to overturn them. Sophia Andres has traced Shelley's use of "narrative images reminiscent of paintings by the renowned and popular painter Henry Fuseli," arguing that Shelley allies Matilda to aestheticized female characters like Mad Kate in "a deliberate attempt to give voice to figures whose painted silence has promoted stereotypically passive femininity" (258).

emphasizes this ownership: “I . . . decorated the last scene of *my* tragedy with the nicest care” (200, emphasis mine). Her attempt to turn trauma into high tragedy by convincing Woodville to commit suicide with her fails, however, because Woodville is uninterested in this particular narrative.

Matilda resists the plots the poet Woodville offers to her because each would ally her suffering in some way to a process of identity formation that she rejects. While Woodville declines to play a part in Matilda’s play, she too declines to accept the roles he offers her. She signifies her refusal to play the touchingly vulnerable sentimental heroine by repeatedly rejecting the masculine protection he tries to provide and by calling out the aesthetic pleasure he takes in her distress. She negates any possible marriage plot by treating Woodville as a friend rather than a suitor. And she evades the *bildungsroman* and reformed heroine plots by refusing to follow Woodville’s advice to channel her suffering into a spiritual growth that would allow her to be socially useful. She rejects these possibilities because the sentimental plot would disempower her and de-centre her perspective, while the *bildungsroman* and marriage plots would involve the assertion of a bounded bourgeois subjectivity that would stifle her.

The story she does tell instead unravels the construction of selfhood. As in *A Simple Story*, socially desirable identity continues to be imagined in *Matilda* in claustrophobic spatial terms. For both Matilda and her father, conventional, bourgeois selfhood is synonymous with stultifying conformity and emotional isolation. In effect, when Matilda clings to her trauma, we see a reversal of the eighteenth-century paradigm. By perpetuating her traumatized state of mind, Matilda seemingly avoids the kind of imprisoning identity that trapped Inchbald’s

Matilda and Miss Milner – again, in both spatial and psychosocial ways. When Matilda’s trauma rips open the isolating boundaries of discrete selfhood, it destroys the possibility for maintaining civilized community, a form of sociality that at this point relied upon the *homo clausus* model of bounded subjectivity. This traumatic openness nonetheless produces a terrifying intimacy between Matilda and her father, a state of being that she finds both horrifying and spiritually powerful. Compared to this intensity, Woodville’s educative attitude and gently affectionate respect for Matilda’s boundaries is painfully inadequate. She does not want his “aid in ambition or wisdom” but instead “wishe[s] for one heart in which [she] could pour unrestrained [her] complaints” (190). Woodville wants to guide her in such a way as to heal her wound, presumably so that they can rejoin the community together. For Matilda, this form of socially integrated individuation is a barrier to truly intimate connection and to intense spiritual experience.

Matilda experiences this intimacy and spiritual intensity only in the traumatic moment when she and her father rip through the barriers separating them. After her father’s confession and suicide, Matilda insistently keeps her wound open in grief in order to commune with nature and with the dead. She refuses the possibility of healing and the re-construction of social identity offered to her by Woodville, because it would mean sacrificing the transgressive emotional unbinding her traumatic experience created. So too would the life plots of the *bildungsroman* and marriage plot that Woodville holds out for her. The novel thus denies the possibility of a conventionally happy ending. Gone is the late gothic heroine rewarded with marriage for her self-control in the face of

paternal oppression. Gone, too, is the sentimental heroine passing into a tragic yet admirable death, and thereby modelling Christian resignation. Matilda's traumatic suffering resists interpellation by these generic meaning-making systems.

The text is instead a medicalized, case-study novel – or *auto-vivisection* – as Matilda anatomizes the way in which she peevishly and stubbornly clings to the suffering that breaks apart her body and mind, out of a desire to transgress the bounds of individuation. Like Woodville, who “make[s] a scientific simile . . . in the manner . . . of Dr. [Erasmus] Darwin” (192), Matilda uses the imagery of the physical sciences to communicate the limits and transgressive potential of the human body. Echoing contemporary medical writings about the dangers of a bound body and mind, Matilda uses claustral images to represent the stultifying constraints of the normative individuation promoted by contemporary novels. In contrast, images of expansion and rending signify Matilda's trauma. She deploys the tropes of contemporary neurology, using images of electricity, lightning, warmth, and heat to represent the vital life force of nervous energy, its communicative power both within and between bodies, and the way it bursts through barriers in a moment of traumatic psychic shock. In the wake of Matilda's trauma, Shelley depicts her heroine as closed-off within her own self, resisting paradoxically destructive and life-giving nervous energy from the outside world. In the process of writing her tale, however, Matilda re-opens her wound to recount her experiences, metaphorically contaminating and traumatizing her implied readers. Instead of providing readers with a model for the building of personal identity, as many nineteenth-century novels do, *Matilda* engages readers in a process that undoes identity, breaking through the boundaries of discrete selfhood

to produce a traumatic intimacy.

i. Mary Shelley and the Critics: Trauma, Psychoanalysis, and Science

It has become a critical commonplace to think of *Matilda* in terms of psychological trauma. To provide just a few examples, Pamela Clemit calls the novel “a confessional account of traumatic experience” (“*The Fields*” 68), William D. Brewer considers the novel in terms of “posttraumatic word repression” (171), and Lauren Gillingham claims that *Matilda* presents “her life as a mere consequence of the traumas that have punctuated it” (256). Tilottama Rajan traces Shelley’s connection to “a pessimistic countercurrent in the Romantic political novel Trauma is central to these novels, interrupting or negating the project of critique” (55).

A novel that opens with an allusion to Oedipus and deals with the wounding after-effects of father-daughter incest certainly seems to beg for psychoanalytic engagement, and it is therefore unsurprising that critics who make the concept of trauma central to their interpretive projects tend to read *Matilda* as an anticipation of Freud or psychoanalytic trauma theory. Diane Hoeveler, for instance, reads the novel as an expression of the Freudian “infantile beating fantasy” (160) and explains *Matilda*’s father’s intense love and suicide as a return of “the primordial trauma” of *Matilda*’s mother’s death (169).⁶² Rosaria

⁶² Hoeveler interprets the novel “as a working out of Mary Shelley’s own fantasy of the family romance turned nightmare” (165). This tradition of reading *Matilda* autobiographically dates back to Elizabeth Nitchie, editor of the first published edition of the novel in 1959. In a 1943 article on the still unpublished text, Nitchie writes, “No wonder if Mary felt that, like Mathilda, she had truly lost a beloved but cruel father, a loss all the more poignant because of what she later acknowledged to Mrs Gisborne was her ‘excessive and romantic’ attachment to him” (459). For

Champagne lauds Shelley for “anticipat[ing] both Freud and . . . contemporary trauma theory” and exclaims with admiration: “One has to ask: how did Mary Shelley know?” (262). Mary Jacobus also uses psychoanalysis and trauma theory to read *Matilda* as a “traumatized text” grappling with “incest-trauma” (166), but she does so without privileging these psychoanalytic frameworks:

By reading Shelley’s novella as a text of trauma . . . I don’t mean to claim that psychoanalysis has the status of a master discourse, or to give a post-Kleinian account of creativity the last word on the feelings, aesthetics, or histories that complicate its writing. But as a discourse that has something to say about negativity and destructiveness, psychoanalysis offers a way, not so much to ‘economize’ what would otherwise remain unusable in *Matilda*, as to hear its lost poetry. (200)

Though my own project approaches Shelley’s text with different materials for comparison, my goal is not to replace the master-discourse of psychoanalysis with the master-discourse of medicine. I argue that the novel makes recourse to scientific language, but that it does so to *resist* the elevation of one mode of discourse over another. This chapter traces Shelley’s self-conscious use of scientific language against both poetic idealization and therapeutic medicalization. Thus, as I argue in this dissertation in general, the medical and literary tropes do not so much operate in conflict with each other as they co-produce meaning-

other criticism linking the novel to Shelley’s life, see Ranita Chatterjee, “Filial Ties: Godwin’s *Deloraine* and Mary Shelley’s Writings;” Terence Harpold, “‘Did you get Mathilda from Papa?’: Seduction Fantasy and the Circulation of Mary Shelley’s ‘Mathilda;’” Katherine Hill-Miller, *My hideous progeny: Mary Shelley, William Godwin, and the Father-Daughter Relationship*; Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*; and Tilottama Rajan, “Mary Shelley’s *Mathilda*: Melancholy and the Political Economy of Romanticism.”

making systems for explaining, economizing, and healing psychological pain. Following this logic, early- to mid-nineteenth-century trauma novels like *Matilda* expose the inadequacy of these systems and the problematic dimensions of the bourgeois subjectivity on which they are frequently based.

In an early critical assessment of Shelley's engagement with scientific discourse, Ann K. Mellor asserts that Shelley "grounded her fiction . . . upon an extensive understanding of the most recent scientific developments of her day" (89). Like *Matilda*, *Frankenstein* has attracted copious psychoanalytic critical attention,⁶³ but following Mellor's lead, much recent scholarship on *Frankenstein* has focused on Shelley's engagement with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific issues and texts.⁶⁴ In Shelley's own introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, she highlights the importance of conversations she overheard between Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, and John William Polidori about the experiments of Erasmus Darwin and Luigi Galvani (8-9). As part of her research while writing *Frankenstein*, she also read the work of contemporary scientists, such as Humphrey Davy and Paul Henry Thiry Holbach (*Shelley Journals* 90, 96).

Despite Shelley's records of her own scientific reading, critics are divided

⁶³ For a review and analysis of psychoanalytic criticism on *Frankenstein*, see Fred Botting, *Making Monstrous: Frankenstein, Criticism, Theory*.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Judith Barbour, "The Professor and the Orang-Outang: Mary Shelley as a Child Reader;" Marilyn Butler, Introduction to *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus: the 1818 Text*; Patricia Fara, "Educating Mary: Women and Scientific Literature in the Early Nineteenth Century;" Ian Jackson, "Science as Spectacle: Electrical Showmanship in the English Enlightenment;" Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall, eds., *Frankenstein's science: Experimentation and Discovery in Romantic culture, 1780-1830*; Janis McLarren Caldwell, *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain*; Ann K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*; Alan Rauch, "The Monstrous Body of Knowledge in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*;" and Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*.

on the source of the influence of science in her fiction. In contrast to Mellor's detailed comparison between *Frankenstein* and Davy's *Introductory Discourse*, Marilyn Butler claims that Shelley "allude[s] to books of science relatively little" (xxix). Butler focuses instead on Shelley's immersion in a broader scientific culture, and claims that she drew scientific inspiration from "spectator-orientated demonstration, perhaps known about at second-hand—such as lectures, given from 1800 in centres such as London to audiences as large as a thousand at a time, and afterwards reported in newspapers and journals" (xxix). Butler also credits the Shelleys' friendship with the materialist physiologist William Lawrence as providing some of the impetus for *Frankenstein*. Lawrence engaged in a very public debate with his teacher, William Abernethy, about the nature and origin of life. He asserted a materialist conception of life against Abernethy's vitalist theory of an extra-material and possibly electrical life force (xvii),⁶⁵ and Butler connects *Frankenstein's* similar concern with the origin of life and with electricity to this debate (xvi-xvii). Like Butler, Judith Barbour looks beyond Mary Shelley's self-documented adult reading list, emphasizing her exposure to natural history, medicine, and chemistry through the juvenile literature and popular science that her father William Godwin published when she was a child. And finally, in a similar vein, Patricia Fara remarks that "Shelley studied geography, mathematics and chemistry" as a young girl, and asserts the likelihood of her exposure to "introductory science texts being written by women at this period" (19). Despite

⁶⁵ For more on the materialist-vitalist debate and its connection to Romantic literature, see Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, and Ian Jackson, "Science as Spectacle: Electrical Showmanship in the English Enlightenment." The debate took place between 1814 and 1819, and Shelley completed *Matilda* in 1820.

their differing approaches to the sources at Shelley's disposal, these scholars typify the way that Shelley's fiction has been mined for formative scientific theories.

Although critics have established Shelley's immersion and interest in scientific culture, especially in their attention to *Frankenstein*, little attention has been paid to the way in which Shelley's other work might engage with scientific discourse in less explicit ways. A notable exception is Elizabeth A. Dolan's *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era*, which assesses the connection between nineteenth-century medical culture and Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy*. Dolan's historicist methodology is fairly consistent throughout the book, and she traces some interesting links between *Rambles* and Romantic medical ideas about sight and the picturesque. Nonetheless, she concludes that *Rambles* ultimately has more in common with twentieth-century trauma theory than with Shelley's contemporary medical culture: "Mary Shelley's comments about the salutary effects of picturesque novelty are rooted in memory and loss. While this paradox is not necessarily consistent with eighteenth-century conceptions of health travel, it is consistent with trauma theory" (145).

Likewise, in *The Mental Anatomies of William Godwin and Mary Shelley*, Brewer "explores the influence of Enlightenment and Romantic-era theories of the mind" on Godwin and Shelley (18), but insists that, since they "had little reliable medical data on which to base their explorations of the psyche," they instead "derived their psychological conceptions and theories from personal observations, philosophical treatises, and literary works" (22). Brewer's detailed analysis of Shelley's engagement with philosophical and literary models is

certainly convincing, but his dismissal of the significance of proto-psychiatric medicine because of its reliance on “primitive” therapies like bleedings, purgatives, and opium (22) is problematic. While *Matilda* does not engage as overtly with science as does *Frankenstein*, it is nonetheless informed by contemporary medical understandings of the effects of shock and grief, including those notions now considered “primitive.” Brewer assumes that Shelley could not have taken seriously any medical theory that a twenty-first century reader would reject, but this assertion overlooks the Shelleys’ friendships with and respect for prominent physicians, who frequently prescribed Mary, Percy, and their children these very treatments, as I discuss below. A cursory reading of Mary Shelley’s diaries and letters reveals the extent to which the health of her family was a constant concern, and references to illness, physicians, and treatment methods abound. An approach like Brewer’s is also problematic in that it privileges the disembodied mind over the material body, despite the marked emphasis that Shelley places on Matilda’s physical sensations and symptoms.

This chapter therefore surveys a broad array of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific texts, in order to sketch out the recurring theoretical constructs and metaphors that were important to the contemporary scientific culture in which Shelley was immersed and on which she draws in her depiction of the body and mind in pain. I examine widely available and influential domestic medical manuals and collections of case studies in order to get a sense of common treatment methods. I also examine the work of scientists with whom Mary Shelley was likely familiar, including Robert John Thornton, whose book Percy Shelley owned; Paul Henry Thiry Holbach, whose writings Mary Shelley read while

writing *Frankenstein*; Erasmus Darwin, whose ideas Shelley claimed influenced *Frankenstein* and whose scientific similes Woodville alludes to in *Matilda*; and William Lawrence and John Bell, personal friends and physicians to the Shelley family. My intention is not to argue that these specific scientific writers necessarily had a direct influence on *Matilda*, or that this novel is an uncritical application of contemporary medical theory. As Alan Richardson has argued in *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, Romantic literary and scientific writers carried on a dialogue with one another, were mutually influential, and often shared many of the same assumptions and metaphors. Though Mary Shelley does not deploy scientific ideas uncritically, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scientific discourse provides a lens through which to reexamine the trauma that critics have agreed is central to the novel, while also bringing into focus the specifically Romantic body that Shelley insistently evokes.

ii. *Matilda* as Case Study Novel of Trauma

As narrator of her own tale, Matilda adopts a self-diagnostic medical gaze and language to anatomize her trauma and melancholy. She signals this medical tone by repeatedly detailing the state of her pulse, temperature, heartbeat, and disordered brain. She also frequently assumes a split perspective in order to describe her irrational psychological state with a degree of medical detachment. In her description of her behaviour towards Woodville, for example, she describes herself as:

captious and unreasonable: my temper was utterly spoilt. I called him my friend but I viewed all he did with jealous eyes. If he did not visit

me at the appointed hour I was angry, very angry, and told him that if indeed he did feel interest in me it was cold, and could not be fitted for me, a poor worn creature, whose deep unhappiness demanded much more than his worldly heart could give. When for a moment I imagined his manner was cold I would fretfully say to him – ‘I was at peace before you came; why have you disturbed me? . . . you forced yourself upon me and gave me those wants which you see with triumph give you power over me’ (198)

She recognizes that these are “peevish words” but claims that she lacks the emotional strength to resist saying them (198).

Of course, Matilda’s analytic detachment from her former perspective need not necessarily be read as medicalized. Shelley uses a relatively common novelistic technique when she contrasts the perspective of her older narrator, in the time-frame of the discourse, with that of her younger self, in the time-frame of the story. Yet, in this and other passages, Matilda reproduces the language and tone of contemporary physicians who describe melancholics. William Buchan, writer of the popular home health manual *Domestic Medicine* (1769),⁶⁶ maintains that melancholics are “fretful; fickle; captious; and inquisitive; solicitous about trifles” (482), much like the “fretful” and “captious” Matilda, who overreacts to perceived slights. In 1806, Charles Bell⁶⁷ also notes the “testy, pettish, peevish

⁶⁶ This text was first published in 1769 but continued to be very popular in Shelley’s time. As C.J. Lawrence has pointed out, “new editions, reprints and pirated versions appeared every few years in Britain until 1846” (20).

⁶⁷ The Shelleys befriended Charles Bell’s brother and frequent co-writer John Bell, engaging him as their physician shortly after they arrived in Rome in March 1819 (Bieri 119). Mary

countenance bred of melancholy” (*Essays on the Anatomy of Expression* 134); Matilda similarly describes her reactions as “peevish.” Bell explains that the melancholic is “incapable of receiving satisfaction from whatever source it may be offered” (134), much like Matilda, whose “deep unhappiness demanded more than” Woodville could give. Bell also insists that the melancholic “cannot endure any man to look steadily upon him, or even speak to him, or laugh . . . without thinking himself contemned, insulted, or neglected” (134). Matilda experiences a comparable sensitivity to potentially patronizing looks; when Woodville first begins riding near her isolated country home, she explains that her unreasonable anger arises from her resistance to being “gazed on by one of superior rank” (194). Here and elsewhere in the novel, Matilda details her unhealthy reactions with analytical detachment and using the diagnostic criteria of contemporary physicians.

Indeed, her anatomization of her shock and melancholic grief is less sentimental and more medicalized than many similar accounts in contemporary medical texts. Thornton’s *The Philosophy of Medicine*, a book Percy Shelley ordered from Thomas Hookham in 1812 (Sha 203), offers a useful contrast. At the beginning of Volume IV, Thornton provides a brief scientific explanation of nervous exhaustion and of the effects of strong passions, such as shock and grief. He follows this succinct introductory section with a series of case studies of

Shelley’s journals for the months that follow record his frequent social and medical calls. In an April 6, 1819 letter to Leigh Hunt, she writes that Percy’s “doctor . . . has been of service to him” (*Shelley Letters* 92) and in an April 9, 1819 letter to Maria Gisborne, she claims that they will head to Naples because “an eminent English surgeon will be there” to attend Mary in her pregnancy (*Shelley Letters* 93). Editor Betty T. Bennett identifies this surgeon as Bell in the notes (94). See below for my discussion of Bell’s treatment of the Shelleys’ dying son William, shortly before Mary began writing *Matilda*.

grieving parents and orphans, and of love lost and betrayed. These sentimental tales, frequently drawn from literary sources, are not medicalized or explicitly connected to the introductory section on nervous exhaustion. The tales seem set so firmly in a literary tradition of decorous suffering that Thornton cannot interpose another system of meaning, and is content to let them stand untouched as self-contained examples of “permanent exhaustion.”⁶⁸

A more in-depth analysis of Thornton’s adoption of a sentimental literary perspective on shock and suffering clarifies the radical nature of Shelley’s anti-sentimental and medical perspective, to which I will return shortly. In the “History of Mademoiselle de M---,” a case study of love amidst the Reign of Terror, Thornton initially reflects changing late-eighteenth-century attitudes to suffering by insisting on the inappropriateness of older literary genres that aestheticize pain. Though the events Thornton describes happen in Provence, he claims that Petrarch is out of place: “Divine poet! no more shall the unhappy lover seek for consolation in shedding delicious tears on the brink of that fountain where thou hast wept for Laura!” (33). In the wake of the trauma of the French Revolution,

⁶⁸ Helen Small traces a similar pattern in other medical writing about love mad women. Of Joseph Cox’s *Practical Observations on Insanity*, which I discuss later in this chapter, she writes:

Something goes wrong . . . when it introduces the subjects sentimental fiction would lead us to expect could be handled most securely. Far from there being a ready reciprocity between medicine and fiction, in Cox’s 1804 text the most culturally established narratives about insanity do not work. Precisely because those narratives *are* established, *are* self-contained, *are* predetermined, they allow no space for the imposition of the wider narrative structure *Practical Observations* is concerned to follow: the narrative which leads from the derangement of the patient, through the physician’s intervention, to the patient’s cure. (48)

. . . those enchanting dreams, those dear illusions, have for ever vanished—. . . the magical spell is broken, the soothing charm is dissolved; the fairy scenes have been polluted; the wizard bower profaned; the orange groves are despoiled of their aromatic sweetness; the waters are tinged with blood; the hollow cliffs re-echo the moans of the wretched, and the shriek of despair; the guillotine has arisen amidst those consecrated shades where love alone had reared its altars! (34)

Just as Woodville's sentimental narrative mode cannot contain Matilda's trauma, Thornton claims that the Renaissance poetic tradition cannot represent the horrors of the French Revolution.

Yet, despite this assertion of sentimental and artistic disenchantment, Thornton nonetheless tells a touching story of a classic sentimental heroine, a young girl "in all the bloom of beauty" who loses her parents in the Revolution (34). Like one of the orphans in Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, Adelaide is cared for by a substitute father-figure, her kind and elderly uncle. Though she is frequently "the prey of deep and settled melancholy," she nonetheless has "too much sensibility not to feel [her uncle's] tender cares, and often restrain[s] her tears in his presence because they [give] him pain" (34). Softened by the beauties of nature, she and her cousin Charles fall in love while reading Petrarch together. Yet when Charles is forced to join the army and her uncle is unjustly executed as a traitor, "her reason entirely forsook her" (37).

When Adelaide's reason forsakes her, so does the Petrarchan literary tradition Thornton has been keen to exploit. Yet her loss of sanity does not mean

the loss of a legible literary trope, as Thornton turns instead to the techniques of sentimental tableaux in his detailed descriptions of Adelaide's mental and physical "ramblings" in nature, as recounted by her "faithful servant" (39):

She often retired to a small nook near the torrent, where her uncle had placed a seat, and where he usually passed some hours of the day.

Sometimes she seated herself on the bench; then starting up, and throwing herself on her knees before the spot where her uncle used to sit, bathed it with floods of tears. "Dear old man," she would cry, "your aged head! Poor Charles!" (39)

Despite Thornton's claim that Petrarch's "delicious tears" can no longer be evoked in this troubled time, his case study nonetheless attempts to stimulate the tears of sentimental romance. He seems more directly focused on this sentimental and aesthetic effect, rather than on the illustration of any particular medical point. Compared to the detailed description of Adelaide's sentimentalized madness, and to her tender loyalty to the memory of her uncle and beloved, Thornton's diagnosis is far more succinct: "The life of Adelaide was near its close. The convulsive pangs of her mind had reduced her frame to a state of incurable weakness and decay" (41). Despite his insistence that such suffering can no longer be aestheticized, and despite his attempt to interpose a medical perspective, Thornton nonetheless emphasizes the poetic and sentimental aspects of Adelaide's tale.

Thornton does not describe the physical symptoms of his case studies in permanent exhaustion in any detail, but his understanding of emotional collapse is

premised on the eighteenth-century conception of health and disease in terms of the appropriate level of stimulation in the body. As I argue below, Shelley foregrounds this medical model of emotional collapse far more consistently in her novel than does Thornton in his case studies. Of particular relevance to Thornton's view of nervous exhaustion are William Cullen's description of the nervous system's states of "excitement" or "collapse" and Thomas Brown's analysis of life as "excitability," both of which Thornton refers to repeatedly and with approbation elsewhere in his work.⁶⁹ Thornton does not discuss or apply these theories in any detail in this section on permanent exhaustion, however, and the style of this assemblage of literary examples of the effects of shock and grief clashes with the rest of Thornton's text, which reviews and assesses contemporary theories of anatomy and physiology, proposes new treatment methods based on experiment and analysis, and surveys the history of Western medical theories from Hippocrates onwards. In these cases of shock and grief, Thornton proposes no treatment methods, can imagine no outcome but madness and death, and seems content to let literature tell the whole story.⁷⁰

In contrast, Shelley's tale of shock, melancholic grief, and permanent exhaustion draws as heavily on the language of medicine as it does on poetic

⁶⁹ Based on this understanding of disease, physicians would frequently prescribe stimulants or sedatives as a way of increasing or decreasing the stimulation of the nervous system. See Beth Dolan Kautz's "Spas and Salutary Landscapes: The Geography of Health in Mary Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy*" for an examination of Shelley's experiences with German spa doctors who imposed treatment regimens based on such theories of excitability. She argues that "While Mary Shelley resists the doctors' efforts to protect their patients from every possible stimulus, the same concept of excitability . . . underlies her belief in the therapeutic effect of aesthetic scenes" (171).

⁷⁰ Thornton does, however, provide some common-sense advice about how to console grieving friends, using an example from *Electra* to establish that empathy is more effective than reason (IV 75).

allusion to diagnose and track Matilda's symptoms. Claire Raymond has argued that the novel "sweeps past Mathilda's bodily life" and that it "works by eliding the heroine's body from a text that is all about the body's vulnerability" (77). Yet, while Matilda does elide sexuality, she does not elide the body completely. Indeed, she describes her bodily symptoms in excruciating detail, using an anti-sentimental medical tone. Unlike Thornton in his case studies of emotional exhaustion, Shelley seems particularly keen to track Matilda's level of excitability and stimulation in ways that are consistent with Cullen and Brown's doctrines. After Matilda's father's confession, she swings back and forth between states of overexcitement and collapse. She continually notes the "tumult" and "fever" of her blood (179, 182) and her "scorching skin" (182) or, alternately, her "cold perspiration" (173) and shivering (173). Her nerves are "convulsed" (173) and "tremble" (184). As she desperately tries to reach her father before he commits suicide, she describes her physical state: "I shivered, yet my pulse was high with fever. . . . I shed no tears but my eyes wild and inflamed were starting from my head; I could hardly support the weight that pressed upon my brain" (183). After her father's death, she tracks how her "fever succeeded to convulsions and faintings, and for some weeks my unhappy spirit hovered on the very verge of death" (184). Later in the novel, she describes the over-stimulating and exhausting effect of lying in the cold rain and sleeping in wet clothes: "my strength became less and less . . . my cheek, before pale, burned with a hectic fever" (207). Over and over again, Matilda foregrounds the bodily symptoms of her trauma using medical language derived from contemporary theories of excitability.

Matilda also wrests control of this language and knowledge from the

physicians. She shares with the reader the specific prescription her doctor gives her for “digitalis” (207), a medication used to slow circulation and diminish excitability in consumption patients. She explains that, by reading this prescription, she figures out that she is consumptive and on the verge of death, information her doctor did not share with her (207). She therefore invokes the common medical assumption that delicate female patients should be protected from detailed knowledge of their own illnesses, but Matilda fights against this convention, deciphering the medical discourse on her own and wresting control of her life and story from the doctor. Like a self-diagnosing physician, she “watch[es] the progressive decay of [her] strength” (208), “feel[s] [her] pulse,” “place[s] [her] thin hand on [her] check” to feel that it “burns” and notes the “slight, quick spirit within [her] which is now emitting its last sparks” (151). Scientific language helps Matilda articulate her embodied anguish in a way that challenges the disembodied or alluringly sexualized suffering of sentimental heroines as well as the masculine medical tradition’s control over the stories and bodies of suffering patients.

Matilda combines this scientific discourse with a self-consciously literary tone, and she therefore presents herself as both a medical case study in the effect of shock *and* a novelistic case study in the causes and consequences of emotional trauma. Because Matilda is uninterested in curing herself, she does not use scientific or literary language for therapeutic means. I argue that she does so, instead, in order to make her readers see her body and her suffering in new ways. She defies the therapeutic teleology of medical science while also resisting the

educative teleology of the *bildungsroman* and marriage plot.⁷¹ Writing a case study about one's own suffering could imply self-curing therapeutic mastery; while most late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century physicians recommended that their patients not think about painful events, Adam Smith argues that communication about one's pain has the potential to promote increased emotional self-command (Brewer 158). But, as I discuss in further detail below, *Matilda* has no interest in getting well. Likewise, shaping experience into narrative form and the self into character could be an energy-binding exercise in self-definition or *bildung*, but *Matilda*'s incoherent anti-narrative does not fix her in a readily comprehensible plot or structure of meaning.⁷²

In describing herself, she combines copious references to occasionally contradictory medical literature with obsessive allusions to a host of contrasting literary characters. She alludes to scientific theories of excitability, evolutionary botany, humoral medicine, electricity, and neurology. Similarly, she compares herself to Oedipus (151), Psyche (163), Proserpine (164), David (165), Job (185), Cain (203), Spenser's Despair (201), Wordsworth's Lucy (157), Dante's *Matilda* and Beatrice (205-6), Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* (187), Fletcher's Lelia (165),

⁷¹ Rajan argues that *Matilda* cannot even be called a novel, as it "defies by its brevity the participation in kinship structures and the belief in '*bildung*'" (47) upon which the novel relies. While I agree with Rajan about the text's resistance to these common novelistic features, I argue that it is nonetheless a novel, since it evokes and relies upon such generic expectations, even while it thwarts them.

⁷² The final version of the novel thus differs dramatically from Shelley's first draft, "The Fields of Fancy." In this dream vision set in the Elysian Fields, *Mathilda* tells her tale to Diotima, who in turn instructs her in the wisdom of rising above her selfish and all-engrossing passion. Davenport Garrett argues that, "When Mary Shelley jettisoned this frame" in the final version of the text, she also "eliminated the didactic model" (50). Rajan also argues that this "Platonic and Dantesque *bildung* . . . which mimes what one is supposed to do in shaping 'life' into 'art,' is entirely dropped in *Matilda*" (46). For more on the relationship between Shelley's draft and the final version of her text, see Pamela Clemit, "From *The Fields of Fancy* to *Matilda*: Mary Shelley's Changing Conception of Her Novella."

Boccaccio's Sigismunda (174), and Shakespeare's Constance (186, 187). As Diana Edelman-Young argues, Matilda's obsessive intertextuality "erases the distinction between her own text and the texts of others" thereby "reflect[ing] the fragmentation of . . . the individual subject" (130-1). This intertextuality extends to her combination of the scientific with the aesthetic, and the objective with the subjective. Because Matilda plays the roles of both doctor and patient, and because she relies upon a variety of only loosely connected scientific and literary discourses, these motley discursive fields articulate an unstable subject position. The novel erases distinctions between discursive realms and perspectives; this confusion of distinctions in the formal realm parallels the traumatic violation of the boundaries of Matilda's discrete identity.

iii. Binding and Unbinding in Science and the Novel

The binding and unbinding of discrete selfhood was an important concern in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century medical discourse. In ways that I will shortly compare to *Matilda*, Romantic medical texts frequently posit the bound or constricted body as prone to illness, and recommend openness and freedom from constraint for good mental and physical health. In *Domestic Medicine*, Buchan warns against the "sedentary professions" that keep the body unnaturally restricted (74) and against the "confinement of females" in the home (591). He also condemns swaddling as "manacling" (36), insists that children be kept in loose clothes (36), and advises adults to avoid constricting their bodies for the sake of fashion (116). As the cure for a wide variety of ailments, he prescribes change of scene, airy rooms, gardening, and vigorous exercise in the open air for

both sexes, as even young girls should be encouraged to “romp around” out of doors (52). Thomas Trotter, in his *View of the Nervous Temperament* (1808), similarly objects to tight lacing, lack of exercise, and confinement “in a close room” (35). Thornton argues for the importance of emotional openness as well, insisting that “man, by his very constitution, is framed to be open and sincere” (II 210). In a natural state, people

expose their hearts to view, by giving way to all the natural signs.
And even when men learn to dissemble their sentiments . . . there
still remain checks that keep dissimulation within bounds, and
prevent a great part of its mischievous effects. The total suppression
of the voluntary signs during any vivid passion, begets the utmost
uneasiness, which cannot be endured. (II 210)

In this Rousseauvian, Romantic medical theory, the healthy body and mind thrive only in complete freedom and openness. Though liberty and unbinding are common Romantic literary concerns, Shelley relies upon the particularly medical implications of this concept in her 1830 novel *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*. Since Monina has “acquired some little skill in surgery,” she recognizes that the key to a wounded prince’s recovery is to move him “to a town on the eastern side of the mountains, overlooking the plain bordering the sea,” away from his current habitation, which is “low-built, hedged in by mountains” and thus “ill suited for the patient” (236). In sharp contrast to the model of strictly demarcated, bound subjectivity that Dror Wahrman argues arose in the late eighteenth century and dominated the nineteenth-century novelistic tradition, this line of Romantic medical practice was therefore in league with Romantic poetry in emphasizing the

importance of bodily and emotional openness.⁷³

In *Matilda*, Shelley combines this perspective on the health benefits of freedom and openness with a novelistic emphasis on the difficulty of harmonizing individual freedom and sociality. As Franco Moretti has argued, classical *bildungsromane* frequently begin by staging a conflict between individualistic desire and social order. Yet the *bildungsroman* protagonist ultimately recognizes that he or she can only attain autonomous selfhood by freely adapting to the constraints of a society that guarantees him or her a place and identity (Moretti 11-16). *Matilda* does not follow this plot structure, but it does explore the fraught relationship between individuation and social constraint that dominates the nineteenth-century novelistic tradition. Shelley diagnoses Matilda's and her father's emotional destructiveness and mutual traumatization as symptomatic of the individuating constraint that the social world requires and that has warped and imprisoned them. Instead of staging the eventual harmonization of individual and society, in *Matilda*, the relationship between individuation and sociality is so totalizing and unsatisfying that traumatic violation becomes the only escape.

In their youths, both characters swing back and forth between two problematic states. In one mode, they adopt constricting and socially constructed identities in order to have relationships with other people. In the other, they indulge in a solipsistic psychic openness that is incompatible with meaningful sociality. These states are represented with spatial images of containment and

⁷³ To provide a few brief examples, William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* both make escape from the constraints and manacles of imprisoning individuation a central theme.

imprisonment, on the one hand, and openness and freedom, on the other.

Matilda's only significant relationship in her childhood is with her aunt, who demands a stifling level of self-containment from her:

She never caressed me, and seemed all the time I stayed in the room to fear that I should annoy her by some childish freak. My good nurse always schooled me with the greatest care before she ventured into the parlour—and the awe my aunt's cold looks and few constrained words inspired was so great that I seldom disgraced her lessons or was betrayed by the exemplary stillness which I was taught to observe during these short visits. (157)

This relationship offers little real intimacy as Matilda describes her aunt as “a plant beneath a thick covering of ice; I should cut my hands in endeavouring to get at it” (157). An impassable barrier separates them. Matilda has no intimate friends because her aunt keeps her physically separate from the local peasantry in order to preserve her accent (158), isolating her to enhance her status-based sociality. Matilda therefore lives a stifled existence in “in a remote part” of this isolated Scottish house (157). Shelley relies upon this architectural image to represent Matilda's private, bounded subjectivity, thus participating in the novelistic spatialization of identity that I trace throughout this dissertation. In nature, however, Matilda indulges in a solitary form of psychic openness. She says she “ran wild about our park and the neighbouring fields” (157), pouring her love into the natural world and into fantasized love objects, particularly her absent and imagined father. In her youth, Matilda is therefore either emotionally and physically free in relationships with the creations of her own mind, or bound in

constricting and unfulfilling relationships with others.

Matilda's father swings between the same extremes of isolated freedom and social constraint, both of which are figured in spatial terms that reflect the increasingly demarcated nineteenth-century identity regime. Matilda's father is dangerously unbound as a young man; "educated by a weak mother with all the indulgence she thought due to a nobleman of wealth," he is given "the free use of large sums of money" and the "independence" of "being always allowed to act for himself" (152). His "generosity" is "unbounded," but his "careless extravagance . . . ma[kes] him squander immense sums of money to satisfy passing whims, which from their apparent energy he dignifie[s] with the name of passions" (152). Yet, just as Matilda's emotional openness engenders solipsism, Matilda's father's lack of discipline leads to his imprisonment in intellectual conformism: "he consider[s] queer and out of fashion all opinions that [a]re exploded by his circle of intimates" and his "narrowness of ideas" makes him view study as a "school-boy shackle" (153). He is also emotionally isolated from this close circle of peers, from whom he must keep his love for a poorer and older girl secret, for fear of teasing (153). Still, his "well moulded" heart guides him to choose this girl, Diana, for his wife (153). Their loving relationship seems ideal, but Shelley describes it using images that suggest imprisonment and domination. Diana's understanding holds her husband "in thrall," and so she becomes his "monitress" (154, 155). Matilda's father's happiness comes at the price of his freedom. He enters into a state of loving intimacy, but Diana's role as moral "monitress" seems as potentially problematic as Matilda's aunt's stifling disapproval. In both cases, bourgeois familial relationships require psychological containment and the rigid

enforcement of boundaries.

Diana's death in childbirth launches Matilda's father into an even greater state of unboundedness than he had in his youth. He abandons his baby daughter and "break[s] all ties" by leaving England (156). In his travels, he crosses borders, penetrates other cultures, and abandons English moral codes:

he had wandered through Persia, Arabia and the north of India and had penetrated among the habitations of the natives with a freedom permitted to few Europeans . . . he had seen so many customs and witnessed so great a variety of moral creeds that he had been obliged to form an independent one for himself which had no relation to the peculiar notions of any one country. (161)

He is psychically uninhibited while travelling, but he is also at this point completely isolated: "The human creatures around me excited in me no sympathy" (178). Like Matilda, he is isolated when unbound.

When he returns to Matilda, they enter a temporary emotional paradise, combining intimacy and emotional openness for the first time in both of their lives. The "burning sun of India, and the freedom from all restraint had . . . increased the energy of his character" (161), and he shares this energetic mobility with Matilda. This emotional state is, once more, communicated with spatial images of containment and freedom. Matilda's life, which had before been a "pleasing country rill, never destined to leave its native fields" becomes a "various river flowing through a fertile and lovely landscape" (162), enlarged and freed through its connection to her father. His passions seem to her to transgress the boundaries of the human body: "so tremendous were the ideas which he

conveyed that it appeared as if the human heart were far too bounded for their conception. His feelings seemed better fitted for a spirit whose habitation is the earthquake and the volcano than for one confined to a mortal body and human lineaments” (163). Matilda is opened up by his very presence: “My ideas were enlarged by his conversation. . . . I was, as it were, transported since his arrival from a narrow spot of earth into a universe boundless to the imagination and the understanding” (163). Up until this point, Matilda has spent most of her time imagining reunions with her father and re-reading a limited few works of literature in her aunt’s library; it is no wonder, then, that her father’s tales broaden her mental landscape.

Before meeting her father, Matilda was trapped by her own limited intellectual experiences. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century medical writers frequently caution against dwelling too fixedly on a narrow set of subjects and cast such intellectual constriction as a form of mental imprisonment. They follow Associationist and Lockean cognitive models that posit selfhood as the sum of experiences imprinted on the mind; a confined set of experiences would therefore create a confined mind. Trotter argues that, when fixated on one thing, people become insensible to and thus closed off from the wider world: “By little recreation, and no change of objects to relieve the attention, the whole nervous system sinks into listlessness and inactivity. The mind itself, by pursuing one train of thought, and pouring too long over the same subject, becomes torpid to external agents” (35-6).

Yet many other medical writers insist, *contra* Locke, that humans have an innate propensity to mental freedom, and that this freedom is necessary to mental

health. “[U]nless fixed down by habit,” Buchan insists, the mind “delights in contemplating new objects” (141-2). In *Practical Observations on Insanity* (1806), Joseph Mason Cox narrates the case of a man “following a profession that confined him most part of the day within doors, and in one position,” who is thereby rendered insane. His symptoms, as described by Cox, evince a clear desire to escape this bodily and mental confinement: “I accidentally saw him amusing himself by leaping through the doors of my carriage with the utmost velocity” (106). Though Matilda’s intellectual confinement does not render her insane, she is delighted by her father’s tales of travel and adventure because they open her up to a wider world. As Shelley later claims in *Rambles In Germany and Italy*:

to fly abroad from the hive, like the bee, and return laden with the sweets of travel – scenes, which haunt the eye – wild adventures, that enliven the imagination – knowledge, to enlighten and free the mind from clinging, deadening prejudices – a wider circle of sympathy with our fellow creatures;---these are the uses of travel, for which I am convinced every one is the better and the happier. (158)

Shelley suggests that such mental and physical openness is crucial to mental and physical health.

However, this freedom of mind is threatened by the novel’s recurrent flirtation with the marriage plot, a form that traditionally works to channel unruly and contradictory energies into economically productive and socially regulated individuation.⁷⁴ Matilda and her father’s relationship is not initially regulated by

⁷⁴ For more on the cultural work performed by the marriage plot, see Franco Moretti, *The*

normative nuclear familial dynamics; their extreme and absolute intimacy is intoxicating to them because of its openness, something neither of them has experienced before. As I argued earlier, in their early lives, both Matilda and her father continuously swing between a constrained sociability and isolated psychic openness. Their relationship with one another allows them to combine intimacy and freedom for the first time in their lives. Yet the spectre of normative social relations, in the form of the marriage plot, threatens this temporary emotional state. Caroline Gonda has demonstrated the centrality of the marriage plot to the father-daughter relationship in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels. She makes a convincing case that “the daughter's apprenticeship in relation to her father was not solely one of formation for ‘her man’, but for her place in society” (18). Though Matilda and her father’s intimacy should be preparatory for Matilda’s eventual marriage and social integration, Matilda’s father reacts with horror and rage at the thought of another man’s interest in her. The erotic and romantic aspects of his feelings first rise to consciousness when an unnamed suitor begins jockeying for Matilda’s affections, thus bringing the situation to a crisis. Sexual jealousy clearly plays a role in his realization of these feelings. But, perhaps more importantly, this third party threatens to place Matilda’s father in a particular role with respect to his daughter. The suitor’s very presence reminds Matilda’s father of the role he should be playing in training Matilda for entrance into a new bourgeois family. In doing so, the suitor threatens to return father and daughter to the bourgeois family structure in which Matilda’s mother became a

“monitress” and in which her aunt’s primary role was to protect her from status contamination.

Matilda signals her awareness of the problematic implications of exchanging their vaguely (though not yet explicitly) incestuous dyad for normative sexual relations soon after the suitor’s presence drives a wedge between them. Her father instructs her to read Dante, beginning “where [her mother] left off,” and then quickly retracts this request (167), thereby expressing confusion about the role Matilda should be playing in their relationship. When he asks Matilda to choose something else, she reads from Spenser on “the descent of Sir Guyon to the halls of Avarice” (167), implying her aversion to the economically mediated alternative to their mutual fantasy of spiritual union. Matilda’s suitor raises the spectre of a regulated, normative network of unsatisfying sociality that is inextricable from patriarchal economics, and it is this possibility that brings Matilda’s father’s boundary-breaking desire to the surface. He tries to recall the pain he felt after his wife’s death, imaginatively resurrecting his wise monitress in order to remind himself of his fatherly duties, but this strategy of control fails when he is only reminded of the connections between his dead wife and the daughter who he thinks can replace her (179).⁷⁵ Matilda’s father is incapable of supporting the process of *bildung* that would allow Matilda to

⁷⁵ Champagne reads Matilda’s father’s behaviour as a strategic move to further entrap her, as “advancing the paternal power to plot the rape of his daughter” (270). After “physically moving with his daughter back to the house that he shared with his late wife, Diana. . . . the father explains that Mathilda is to act as Diana once had. That is, his daughter is now to live with him as his wife” (265). This reading glosses over Matilda’s description of her father’s signs of internal struggle, his explanation for why he moved to the house, and Matilda’s wrenching of his confession from him. It therefore simplifies the complexities in Shelley’s text in order to turn the father into an unambiguous villain.

assume a clearly delineated adult role in the world. His uncontrollable feelings instead make the subject positions of husband, wife, father, mother, and daughter dissolve into meaninglessness.

Mellor argues that this blurring of the distinction between wife and daughter is a critique of patriarchy: “The desire of Mathilda’s father for her is identical with his desire for his wife Diana. . . . When wives are child-brides, there can be no meaningful distinction between wives and daughters, between women and children” (198). Though intriguing, this argument simplifies some of the complexities in *Matilda* and provides a more fitting context for understanding the patriarchal tyrants in the eighteenth-century Gothic tradition that Shelley complicates. Of course, patriarchal economies infantilize women, but Shelley does not foreground Diana’s dependence in *Matilda* as she so clearly foregrounds Elizabeth’s in *Frankenstein*. Like Elizabeth and Victor, Diana and Matilda’s father love one another as children. But, unlike Elizabeth, Diana is not gifted to her future husband as a “pretty present” (*Frankenstein* 35). She is not a child-bride, and is both older than her husband and his moral instructress. Matilda and her father are perhaps more exemplary of the child-bride dynamic Mellor describes; Matilda’s father educates and guides her, and this mentorship is certainly the source of much of the attraction between them. However, their mutual desire for complete intimacy stems from the wish to annihilate all such barriers, to break through cultural limitations and evade the inequities of the marriage market and patriarchal system of parental control. On one level, Matilda’s father takes advantage of paternal power by wooing his own daughter, but at the same time, he abdicates this position of authority by acting like his

daughter's youthful equal.

Throughout her life, Matilda is drawn to the fantasy of complete intimacy with her father, and she too seeks to dispense with the power dynamics and break through the physical and emotional boundaries of individual identity that keep them separate. When her father withdraws into tortured silence to try to keep Matilda at a distance, she tries to wrench his secret from him. In doing so, she assumes a position of power that makes their familial and generic roles meaningless. In contrast to Woodville, who later says, "you hide your griefs: I do not ask you to disclose them, but tell me if I may not console you" (197), Matilda wants to penetrate her father's innermost being. Woodville entreats Matilda to let him "pour *on* [her] the balm of compassion" (197, emphasis mine), while Matilda insists that her father "shall not deny his grief to me and when I know his secret then will I pour a balm *into* his soul and again I shall enjoy the ravishing delight of beholding his smile" (169, emphasis mine). She imagines that this aggressively sexual ejaculation of sympathy will cure her father and bring her "ravishing delight."

Matilda's attempt to force her way into her father's innermost self is planned like a seduction. She chooses an ideal setting to soften his resolve, hoping that "the balmy air and the lovely face of Nature might aid me in inspiring him with mild sensations, and give him gentle feelings of peace and love preparatory to the confidence I determined to win from him" (170). When her father resists, Matilda becomes more aggressive and "demand[s]" (171) an answer. He responds: "Much happier would it be for you and for me if in your frantic curiosity you tore my heart from my breast and tried to read its secrets in it as its

life's blood was dropping from it" (172). Hoeveler argues that Matilda adopts "the pose of gothic feminism" in her "passivity" and "ostensible lack of control" with respect to her father's confession and suicide (162) but Matilda emphasizes her aggression in demanding her father's confession and highlights her father's passivity after she obtains it. For Champagne, "Mathilda is raped by words, by gestures, by her father's gaze, and by the textual gaps in all of these" (272), and while this reading can be argued, so too can its reverse, as Matilda uses a sexualized landscape and language to rip through her father's emotional limits.

Once Matilda's father has admitted his desire, he describes it as a transgressive crossing of boundaries. He exclaims: "We have leapt the chasm I told you of, and now, mark me, Matilda, we are to find flowers, and verdure and delight, or is it hell, and fire, and tortures? Oh! Beloved One, I am borne away; I can no longer sustain myself; surely this is death that is coming. Let me lay my head near your heart; let me die in your arms!" (173) In this ambiguous moment of trauma and ecstasy, of violation and communion, Matilda's father transforms into a swooning Gothic heroine.⁷⁶ He refuses to assume the role of sexual aggressor and abdicates all interpretive power. He asks Matilda to decide on the meaning of his ambiguous words, "My daughter, I love you" (173) and on whether they have precipitated them into Heaven or Hell. By assuming Matilda's

⁷⁶ Earlier in the text, Matilda enacts another significant reversal of generic Gothic expectations. As a young girl, she imagines reuniting with her father in a way that recalls a semi-incestuous scene from Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*. She says, "My imagination hung upon the scene of recognition; his miniature, which I should continually wear exposed on my breast, would be the means" (159). In *The Italian*, while leering lasciviously at a sleeping young woman he is about to murder, the priest Schedoni finds his picture hanging around her neck, thus prompting the realization that she is his daughter. Unlike Radcliffe's passively virtuous gothic heroine, Matilda sees such an ominously incestuous scene as the stuff of fantasy, and eventually turns into a gothic aggressor herself. Bernardo notes that, unlike the typical Gothic heroine, "Mathilda becomes both the villain and the victim" (48-49).

generic role, he thus further erodes the boundary between them, and from this point on, their souls and nervous systems are strangely fused. They transgress social and psychological barriers to bring about a terrifying and traumatic intimacy that destroys individual identity. This intimacy and trauma are presented very ambivalently; though the situation is horrifying for Matilda and destroys her psychological wellbeing, it at the same time frees her from the prison of ego-based subjectivity.

iv. Embodied Trauma and the Rejection of Transcendence

As I noted earlier, imagery of unbinding and the desire to transcend the limits of the body are, of course, conventional Romantic concerns, which scholars have frequently linked to many Romantics' interest in Neoplatonic philosophy.⁷⁷ Yet, as Richardson has argued,

Although literary Romanticism has most often been associated with idealistic and transcendental conceptions of mind, the many points of contact between scientific and literary representations of the embodied psyche helps remind us of an antidualistic, materialist register within Romantic writing that has, until recently, been badly ignored. (36)⁷⁸

⁷⁷ On the connections between Neoplatonism and Romantic poetry, see M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* and *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*; George Mills Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake*; and James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind*.

⁷⁸ This anti-dualistic register has not been ignored in criticism of Mary Shelley and other female Romantic writers, however. Rajan notes in Shelley's writing "a certain bitterness with a Romantic idealism that effaced material detail" (47). As Meena Alexander explains, "in the quest for the sublime women writers were curiously recalcitrant. By and large they withdrew from a

Richardson emphasizes the way Romantic literary and scientific writers operated in dialogue with one another, and were mutually influential. Romantic scientific thought can therefore provide an important context for understanding this image-pattern in Shelley's novel, since Matilda does not etherealize the father she thinks transcends the limits of the human body. She imagines him as a pagan spirit of the volcano and earthquake, part of the natural world he animates. His energetic, boundary-bursting freedom is a force of nature.⁷⁹

Contemporary materialist and dualist scientists grappled with the relative freedom or constraint of the embodied brain or disembodied mind and, like Shelley, they frequently resort to prison and architectural imagery to illustrate their claims. In *The System of Nature, or The Laws of the Moral and Physical World* (1797), a text Mary Shelley read while writing *Frankenstein*, Paul Henry Thiry Holbach insists that the mind is directed utterly by the external agents that act upon it and criticizes dualists who believe that the soul acts and generates thought independently (329-31): "in despite of the continual shackles that bind us, they pretend that we are free" (332). The mind, according to Holbach, is bound by

vision that seemed to reach, without mediation to divinity . . . there is a crossing back, at the brink of visionary revelation, to the realms of ordinary, bodily experience – whether that experience is rendered subtle and elusive, as with Dorothy Wordsworth, or imaged in almost brutal excess, as with Mary Shelley" (167).

⁷⁹ Steven Vine aligns Matilda's father with the transcendentalizing impulse and argues that *Matilda* "critiques the patriarchal and sexual-political basis of an idealising Romantic sublime by reinscribing its transcendences in and as paternal oppression" (147). He claims that "the father, pulverising his identity as a figure of the law because of his illicit love, is unable to 'sustain' himself any longer as a legislator of patriarchy, and loses his position as an operator of the symbolic law" (147-8). While Vine is correct about Shelley's overarching critique of the oppressiveness and sexual politics of transcendence, Matilda's father never assumes his symbolic role in patriarchy. He squanders his money, refuses to raise his daughter, and leaves England and its social mores to wander the globe. Even when he returns, he makes an awkward symbol for disembodied transcendence, racked as he is with incestuous desire and allied with the physical energies of the volcano, earthquake, and sun.

its embodied condition, hemmed in and directed by the world of sensation. The dualist Thornton also believed in the imprisonment of the mind but saw it as a temporary side effect of its residence in the body. He writes that the “Mind or Soul has a much higher origin than that of the perishable frame with which it is at present connected. It is neither nerve nor the electrical fluid. These are only its agents in this its incarcerated state” (170). Charles Bell uses similarly dualist language to conceive of the entrapment of the mind: the “operations of mind are seated in the great mass of the cerebrum” and “are confined . . . by the limited number of our organs of sense” (*Idea of a New Anatomy* 13, 12).⁸⁰

In contrast, the materialist scientist William Lawrence argues that freedom of thought is mandated by the biology of the embodied brain: “I cannot help pointing out to you how strongly the voice of nature . . . opposes all attempts at making mankind act or think alike. . . . The mind . . . cannot be made to move at the word of command; it scorns all shackles; and rises with fresh energy from every new attempt to bind it down on this bed of Procrustes” (95). Describing embodied cognitive freedom in terms similar to those Shelley uses to describe Matilda’s father, Lawrence argues that the natural and inevitable advance of human reason will bring about the “complete emancipation of the mind, the destruction of all creeds and articles of faith” (96).

Of course, despite this similarity, Lawrence cannot be singled out as the source for Mary Shelley’s understanding of instinctive transgression, as Percy

⁸⁰ Alan Richardson notes of this passage that “the phrasing is carefully dualistic, though the theory it expresses effectively renders the mind-body distinction irrelevant, at least throughout the period of mortal life” (32).

Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and other Romantic literary texts provide the more obvious context, and may in fact have influenced Lawrence himself. As I argued earlier, literary romanticism and materialist science were in dialogue. They were both concerned with mental freedom and with the implications of an embodied mind. They also both make recourse to similar spatial imagery to tease out these implications.

For instance, Lawrence uses an elaborate architectural image to critique the illusory liberty held out by the mind-body hierarchy of transcendental conceptions of mental experience, revealing it to be rooted in a kind of oppression. As I will discuss below, Mary Shelley uses a similarly spatial image-pattern to present a related critique in *Matilda*. In Lawrence's ironic vision, the dualists trap the material brain "in a bony case" and give it nothing useful to do:

[I]t has been contended that thought is, not an act of the brain, but of an immaterial substance, residing in or connected with it. This large and curious structure, which, in the human subject, receives one fifth of all the blood sent out from the heart, which is so peculiarly and delicately organised, nicely enveloped in successive membranes, and securely lodged in a solid bony case, is left almost without an office, being barely allowed to be capable of sensation. It has, indeed, the easiest lot in the animal economy; it is better fed, clothed, and lodged than any other part, and has less to do. But its office— only one remove above a sinecure—is not a very honourable one: it is a kind of porter, intrusted to open the door, and introduce new comers to the master of the house, who takes on himself the entire charge of

receiving, entertaining, and employing them. (105-6)

With this vaguely Gothic evocation of a sinecured porter and all-powerful master living together in a bony and secure edifice, Lawrence associates dualist thinking with the injustices and imprisonments of the past. Lawrence's alternate vision of an embodied and naturally emancipated brain challenges the hierarchical and imprisoning tendencies in dualist thought.

In *Matilda*, the oppressive and imprisoning dimension of this desire to rise above the body is expressed through Matilda's father's foil, the ethereal and reasonable Woodville, who wants Matilda to rise above and beyond her trauma. Much like Lawrence evokes the spatial image of the Gothic castle to link mind-body dualism to aristocratic oppression, Shelley deploys imagery that recalls the Enclosure acts in her description of Woodville's desire to control materiality. The "transcendent" Woodville is "railed and fenced in by his own divinity" (190), and Matilda sees this otherworldly quality as another form of binding. He expresses the idealist's desire to overcome and dominate materiality when he lauds the "power" of the human mind to form "another world" that is "more lovely than the visible frame of things" and "which may claim . . . superiority to its model" (196). This desire to reshape and control the material world is also directed at Matilda.⁸¹ Woodville asks her to tell him about her emotional pain so that he can properly condition her affective responses: "utter one word of bitter complaint and I will reprove it with gentle exhortation" (197). He wants to take charge of her

⁸¹ As Genevieve Lloyd argues, Western culture's transcendentalizing impulse implies the "repudiation of what is supposedly signified by the female body" (102). Mellor reads *Frankenstein* as a critique of the masculine desire to control and thus transcend the female body of nature, which would imply that Shelley was well aware of the gendered power play involved in the masculine desire to transcend materiality.

emotional state in order to direct her healing process.

In these scenes, Shelley alludes to the generic conventions of novels of sensibility and *bildungsromane*. Woodville's sentimental affection for Matilda's suffering recalls Dorriforth's tenderness towards Miss Milner in times of distress; her emotional pain is endearing, especially because he thinks he can correct it. Shelley therefore also recalls the tradition of the reformed heroine, holding out the teasing suggestion of *bildung*. Woodville tries to school Matilda into a recovery like his own by making her see the importance of being useful to society. Shelley holds out the possibility that Matilda's grief could be overcome, that the two of them could build a life in the world together, using their shared pain as the basis of mutual love. Yet this plot is frustrated as Matilda does not fit easily into the tradition of the sentimental or reformed heroine, and resists Woodville's offers of help and guidance. Woodville's attempt to shape and control Matilda parallels his desire to shape and control the material world, and both of these desires for transcendence over feminized materiality give Woodville a fenced off, bounded subjectivity that Matilda rejects.

Woodville does try to get close to Matilda and pleads: "You must not shut me from all communion with you" (197). Yet he does not want complete intimacy: "do not tell me why you grieve" (197). The sympathy he provides for the purpose of directing her emotional growth is not what Matilda wants. As she explains, "I did not desire sympathy and aid in ambition or wisdom, but sweet and mutual affection . . . I wished for one heart in which I could pour unrestrained my complaints" (190). Woodville's desire to reprove and control Matilda, along with her well-founded suspicion that he plans to elevate her grief into one of his poems

(199), make their relationship unsatisfactory to her, and ally Woodville and his idealizing tendencies to the binding energies of Matilda's monitress mother and frozen plant of an aunt. Matilda's father's embodied transgressiveness thus offers a stark contrast to Woodville's disembodied constraint, "railed and fenced in" as Woodville is by "his own divinity" (190). The father's physical and emotional passion for Matilda is presented more sympathetically than Woodville's gentle spiritual remonstrance.⁸² Her father's desire to burst through the boundaries separating them is certainly destructive, but it is also understandable, emerging as it does from what Lawrence describes as the body and brain's natural propensity for freedom from constraint, from the "complete emancipation of the mind, the destruction of all creeds and articles of faith" (Lawrence 96). It is this embodied emancipation that breaks down the barriers between Matilda and her father.

v. Vital Heat, Sensibility, and the Shock of Electrical Communication

Even though Matilda achieves the absolute intimacy she desired, she is nonetheless shocked and horrified by her father's incestuous confession. The text deploys electrical and light imagery reminiscent of contemporary neurology in order to represent the charged and dangerous connection between Matilda and her father. This scientific discourse emphasizes the precariousness of individuation;

⁸² Robinson makes a case for reading Woodville positively and Matilda unsympathetically, a perspective he argues Shelley encourages by emphasizing Matilda's "unsocialized behavior with Woodville," who "makes her aware of at least some of her selfishness, her unreasonableness, her arrogance, and her peevishness" (80). Bunnell also reads Woodville positively because "he does not resort to Mathilda's self-pity and remains sympathetic to the needs of others. . . . Mathilda, on the other hand, is either unwilling or unable to benefit from emotional and psychological soul-searching" (81). While both critics are right to note the ambiguity in Matilda's character, and to argue for her imperfection, I would argue that Woodville's attitude to Matilda is certainly not presented as a model for human relations.

electrical energy crosses barriers, and so a moment of traumatic shock can destroy the boundaries of individual selfhood. Electrical science, with its emphasis on sudden and shocking boundary transgression, thus serves as a challenge to the individuating process promoted by many nineteenth-century novels.

Eighteenth and early nineteenth-century scientific texts stressed the electrical basis of nervous communication and emotion. Holbach conceives of all feeling as a kind of electric shock (178, 184) and, in a similar vein, Thornton argues that “excessive fright” makes “the eyes for a moment flash fire” and the “hair [become] electric” (IV 7). The electrical nerve force was thought to facilitate communication between different parts of the body, and Thornton points out that the body has a natural system of barriers to keep this potentially dangerous energy in check: “Ganglions . . . are attached wholly to nerves which supply the organs which have involuntary motion, and being non-electric bodies, are the checks which prevent our volitions from extending to them” (176). He notes, however, that “In violent fits of passion, the accumulated electric fluid of the nerves . . . passes these barriers, and the vital organs are immediately in agitation, and sometimes death ensues” (176). Considering the emphasis on spatiality and boundary transgression in *Matilda*, this propensity of electricity to overrun barriers is of particular relevance. As Joseph Priestley explains in *The History and Present State of Electricity* (1767), the electrical fluid “is not . . . confined to one kind of bodies” and is “no local or occasional agent in the theatre of the world” (xii). Electricity, which scientists linked to nervous shock, was a boundary-crossing agent.

Matilda describes the emotional shocks she experiences in terms of

electricity, extending the scientific account of electrical communication within the body to represent the transgressive and shocking communication of emotion between bodies. At the jarring moment when her father confesses his desire, nervous energy flows between them in such a way as to link their nervous systems to one another. When her father is “unable to express the extent of his emotion,” his eyes “glare” at her “like lightning” (166). When she insists that he tell her what is causing his emotional turmoil, she says, “I demand that dreadful word; though it be as a flash of lightning to destroy me, speak it” (172). When he does confess his incestuous desire, her “fall from happiness to misery” is like a “stroke of lightning” (166) that causes her love for her father to be “blasted” (156). After his terrible secret is revealed, her father writes her a letter claiming to be going on a journey. Yet their emotional connection is so strong that she instantly knows he is about to commit suicide, and has in fact already dreamed he would do so. As she chases him, hoping desperately to catch up before he commits the fatal act, her body’s stormy electrical heat rages alongside a lightning storm. She describes the “fever of [her] blood” and her “scorching skin” alongside “the lightning” that “lighted up the whole country” (182). She stumbles upon “a magnificent oak; the lightnings shewed its myriad boughs torn by the storm” (182) and she calls out to her servant that “if the next flash of lightning rend not that oak my father will be alive” (183). Her words prove prophetic: “I had scarcely uttered these words than a flash instantly followed by a tremendous peal of thunder descended on it; and when my eyes recovered their sight after the dazzling light, the oak no longer stood in the meadow” (183). After this point, the electrical charge in nature and in Matilda’s body subside together: “there was no more thunder and lightning,” her

“heart no longer beat wildly,” and she “did not feel any fever” (183). Matilda’s father communicates with her electrically, across space, and the boundaries between her body, her father’s body, and the natural world, are no longer clear.

This lightning-blasted and strangely prophetic tree represents the nervous communication between father and daughter, a strange and dangerous connection brought about by traumatic shock. In Holbach’s discussion of the nature of electrical transmission throughout the body, he compares the nervous system to a tree: “We only feel by the aid of nerves dispersed through our body, which is itself . . . nothing more than a great nerve, or which resembles a large tree, of which the ramifications experience the action of the roots communicated through the trunk” (178). If, as Holbach claims, the nervous system is like a tree, and if sensory information creates emotion via nervous shock, then Shelley’s lightning-blasted tree may indeed represent the devastating effect of emotion on the nervous system. Yet this pattern of electrical imagery is not merely symbolic. Matilda’s medicalized language and insistent focus on her bodily symptoms make it clear that this recurrent electrical force should be read literally. Matilda’s father communicates emotion electrically, from his nervous system to hers. Once Matilda’s father confesses his incestuous desire for her, passion breaks through all bounds, including those separating them from one another. From this point onward, nervous energy flows from father to daughter with terrifying force. Despite Matilda’s desire to push her father away, she dreams of his suicide and can predict his death. The lightning storm transmits his destructive nervous energy to her across space, and as the lightning strikes the tree, communicating the climax of her father’s energetic self-destructiveness, Matilda passes into a

state of heightened fever and borderline madness. After this crisis, the storm subsides and Matilda's becomes "chilled," just before they find her father "stiff," "straight," and presumably cold in death (183, 184). Matilda faints and, at this point, very little separates the dead father from his "lifeless" daughter (184).⁸³ In the wake of their mutual trauma, Matilda and her father are physically bound to one another, in a terrifying intimacy.

In response to her father's invasive boundary breaking, Matilda wraps herself up in her grief, imprisoning herself in a protective melancholy. She isolates herself once more in a small cottage in the countryside, thus returning to a pathological version of the bound selfhood she rejected early in the novel. In retreating into a protective shell, she exhibits the common symptoms of grief outlined in contemporary medical discourse, and is subject to the dangers doctors attached to undue binding and mental constraint. Trotter argues that, in grief, people become "so absorbed in the contemplation of one object, that the mind appear[s] almost or wholly unconscious of its own existence, and scarcely attend[s] to a single external impression" (83). According to Cox, melancholics are subject to the same tendency to close off the external world: "It frequently happens that maniacs of the melancholic temperament are torpid and apparently insensible to every agent; their mental faculties seem immovably fixed, as if some vow bound them to apathy" (134). Matilda describes her melancholic grief in these terms, as a self-protective sealing off against the intrusions of the external

⁸³ Gillingham argues that Matilda's prophecies may be "self-fulfilling" (264). If so, then it is Matilda's energy that is passed to her father, who instead catches and amplifies her psychic state.

world. And she once again uses spatial and architecture images to represent this bound selfhood. After her father's confession, she kicks him from her, runs away, and shuts herself up in her room (174). She is horrified when he approaches her chamber, and gasps, "Was that not sacred?" (175). She dreams of becoming "a nun; not for religion's sake . . . but that I might for ever be shut out from the world" (175). Her fellow human beings torment her "in the same way as pain and sickness may torment; something extraneous to the mind that galled it, and that [she] wished to cast aside" (190). She maintains an "impenetrable and unkind silence" (151), sees life as a "prison," and considers suicide the only escape from this "voluntary bondage" (201). Though the traumatic rending of limits was something she deeply desired, the complete violation of the bounds of selfhood damages her to such a degree that she self-imprisons in melancholy.

Within this prison, Matilda is shut out from the sun and warmth, and from the bodily vitality and emotional connection they represent in this novel. As I argued earlier, Romantic physicians frequently warned about the dangers of the bound body and mind. Although Thornton warns his readers about the danger to health of overexcitement of the nerves (II 176), he also asserts that the "vital heat" generated by "nervous electricity" is necessary for life (II 22, II 149). It is this vital heat of nervous energy and emotional warmth that Matilda closes herself off from, since she was so deeply damaged by traumatic electric shock. Woodville says "the fire seems extinct within you" (197) and tries to warm her with his compassion. She is, nonetheless, unreachable: "how cold my heart must have been not to be warmed by his eloquent words and tender sympathy" (190). Though she wants to open up, her father, who was her sole source of heat and

light, blasted her utterly. She says that the sympathy of Woodville

came to me as a sun beam in winter to adorn while it helps to
dissolve the drifted snow. – Alas the sun shone on blighted fruit; I
did not revive under its radiance for I was too utterly undone to feel
its kindly power. My father had been and his memory was the life of
my life I was as a solitary spot among mountains shut in on all
sides by steep black precipices; where no ray of heat could penetrate;
and from which there was no outlet to sunnier fields The spirit
of existence was dead within me. (190)

This image anticipates the scene from *Perkin Warbeck* in which the wounded prince is healed when Monina moves him from a space hedged in by mountains to a room with a view. But Woodville cannot be Matilda's Monina; he cannot heal her by introducing her to a wider prospect. After her father's traumatizing electrical transmission of passionate energy to her, she closes herself off to the vivifying heat of emotional and physical response. This loss of nervous vitality is why Matilda becomes ill. According to the doctrines of excitability I described earlier, either too much or too little stimulation can prove fatal.

Matilda is not dead to all feeling, however. She makes clear that she has closed off self-protectively because of an excess of sensitivity: "for I was tender as the sensitive plant, all nerve" (190). The "sensitive plant," or mimosa, contracts and closes up when touched or at sunset, and is therefore referred to frequently in eighteenth and nineteenth-century scientific writing dealing with human irritability and sensibility. John and Charles Bell use the sensitive plant to make the distinction between muscle irritability and nerve sensibility (*Anatomy of*

Physiology 382-3), and in “The Loves of the Plants,” Erasmus Darwin explains the connection he sees between plant and animal response:

Naturalists have not explained the immediate cause of the collapsing of the sensitive plant; the leaves meet and close in the night during the sleep of the plant, or when exposed to much cold in the day-time, in the same manner as when they are affected by external violence, folding their upper surfaces together, and in part over each other like scales or tiles Now, as their situation after being exposed to external violence resembles their sleep, but with a greater degree of collapse, may it not be owing to a numbness or paralysis consequent to too violent irritation, like the faintings of animals from pain or fatigue? (40)

Matilda therefore uses this plant to represent the way she has closed off to the external world self-protectively, after a “too violent irritation.”⁸⁴ In describing herself as a sensitive plant, then, Matilda clarifies that her impermeability and unresponsiveness are signs of her sensitivity. As I argued in Chapter 1, the bounded “self in a case” arose in tandem with the doctrine of sensibility in the eighteenth century, in order to offer protection to the sensitive, suffering self. In a similar manner, Matilda encases herself in a protective emotional covering because she is so receptive to pain.

⁸⁴ Darwin also describes how he attempted to prove the sensibility of plants by conducting experiments on the mimosa, clipping its leaves and dropping oil of vitriol on it. He argues that its contraction response demonstrates that it feels pain (*Phytologia* 120-1). He also discusses other experimenters’ work passing an electrical current through various plants to destroy this irritability (121). In all these cases, Darwin presents the plant’s self-protective contraction, as well as the ability of electrical stimulation to destroy its response, as proof of its sensibility. Matilda’s allusion to Darwin emphasizes her similar sensitivity to pain.

The sensitive plant simile also conveys Matilda's belief that her nervous system is still connected to her dead father, despite this self-protective closing off to the rest of the world. Darwin anthropomorphizes the sensitive plant as a chaste Eastern bride who will open only to her husband, the sun:

Weak with nice sense the chaste Mimosa stands,
 From each rude touch withdraws her timid hands;
 Oft as light clouds o'erpass the summer-glade,
 Alarm'd she trembles at the moving shade;
 And feels, alive through all her tender form,
 The whisper'd murmurs of the gathering storm;
 Shuts her sweet eye-lids to approaching night
 And hails with freshen'd charms the rising light.
 Veil'd, with gay decency and modest pride,
 Slow to the mosque she moves, an eastern bride;
 There her soft vows unceasing love record,
 Queen of the bright seraglio of her lord.---
 So sinks or rises with the changeful hour
 The liquid silver in its glassy tower.
 So turns the needle to the pole it loves,
 With fine vibrations quivering, as it moves. ("The Loves" Canto I
 lines 299-314)

By alluding to the mimosa, then, Matilda implies that her closing off to the world is a way of saving herself for the more complete intimacy she has with her father, who is as removed and ever-present to her as the sun, and who has been the only

light of her life.⁸⁵ After feigning her death, she fantasizes about transmitting fire and warmth back to him: “they will believe me united to my father, and so indeed I shall be. For alone, where no voice can disturb my dream, and no cold eye meet mine to check its fire, then I may commune with his spirit” (185).

This dream communion is realized when Matilda discovers that she really is dying: “in truth I am in love with death; no maiden ever took more pleasure in the contemplation of her bridal attire than I in fancying my limbs already enwrapped in their shroud: is it not my marriage dress? Alone it will unite me to my father when in an eternal mental union we shall never part” (208).⁸⁶ The unclear referent “it” in this last sentence refers ostensibly to death. Yet this “it” follows immediately after the phrase about Matilda’s marriage dress/shroud. Read grammatically, the line therefore implies that it is Matilda’s self-protective shroud of melancholy that unites her to her dead father, as Darwin’s sensitive plant closes up to maintain intimacy with the sun.

vi. Medical and Narrative Purgation

The one barrier to their complete union is Matilda’s belief that she, unlike Darwin’s chaste mimosa bride, is spoiled and sullied by her father’s incestuous desire. She clearly shares his desire, at least on some level, but she does not

⁸⁵ That Darwin’s mimosa is part of an Eastern seraglio is relevant considering Matilda’s father’s familiarity with Eastern customs and disregard of English moral codes. This image also allows Matilda to represent her own complete devotion to her father in a way that nonetheless admits his romantic attachment to two women: her mother and herself.

⁸⁶ For a Kristevan analysis of this desire for bodily communion as a “return to the semiotic state” (120), see Diana Edelman-Young, “‘Kingdom of Shadows’: Intimations of Desire in Mary Shelley’s *Mathilda*.”

confront it directly. She sees her pollution as the result of her father's boundary transgression, which she innocently but recklessly invited by violating the boundaries of his privacy. Though the pollution is a result of their transgressive intimacy, it also becomes, in Matilda's view, the one obstacle to their complete union. Medical images of contamination, poison, and infection foreground the embodied and diseased nature of the father-daughter connection. Though Matilda had longed desperately to transgress the barriers separating her from her father, his traumatic confession infects her with his diseased desire. The traumatic shock that releases them from the bonds of individuation thus also contaminates their relationship.

The contamination begins with Matilda's father, whose blood is tainted with incestuous longing. As he describes it, "unlawful and detestable passion had poured its poison into my ears and changed all my blood, so that it was no longer the kindly stream that supports life but a cold fountain of bitterness corrupted in its very source" (196). When he confesses this desire, Matilda feels as though she has been "stung by a serpent" (173). As the boundaries between them break down, he pours his poisoned blood into her: "I have endeavoured to pollute your mind" (177). In his final letter, he tries not to contaminate her further: "I will not sully your imagination by recounting my combats" (179). Yet Matilda has caught his disease; she sees herself as "a living pestilence" and believes her soul is "corrupted to its core by a deadly cancer" (204). The traumatic rending of barriers separating them fills Matilda with a poison she does not know how to expel. This contamination is why she desires the complete sympathy that would allow her to "pour out [her] misery" (190), and why she longs for the "one heart in which [she]

could pour unrestrained [her] complaints” (190). She is too deeply sensitive to open up this way, however, and Woodville is too fenced off by divinity to reach her.

Early nineteenth-century physicians frequently conceived of disease as resulting from the inability to expel dangerous and poisoning elements within the body, and this belief system was largely responsible for their warnings about the dangers of the bound or confined body that I discussed earlier. Though Galenic and Hippocratic humoral medicine was certainly on the wane by the early nineteenth century, its vestiges continued to shape medical practice. For instance, in February of 1819, the Shelleys’ physician John Roskilly tried to treat Percy’s ailing health by applying a caustic to his side. According to Shelley biographer James Bieri, “This painful procedure, a remnant of ‘humoural’ medicine, possibly opened a suppuration in Shelley’s side to which peas or gentian root were applied in the belief it would draw out the poison” (102). Purgatives, emetics, diuretics, and sudorifics were frequently prescribed for a wide range of ailments, both bodily and mental, in order to cleanse the system of blocked or obstructed secretions.⁸⁷ Mary Shelley’s journal contains a list of their physician John Bell’s prescriptions for her son William when he was battling his final illness in May

⁸⁷ Theoretical explanations for such practices varied. In Herman Boerhaave’s eighteenth-century mechanist medicine, obstructions in the body’s fibres prevent the fluids from flowing, thus causing disease. (See Judith Barbour’s “The Professor and the Orang-Outang: Mary Shelley as a Child Reader” for a discussion of Shelley’s likely familiarity with Boerhaave’s work and of its importance to *Frankenstein*.) According to Cullen’s doctrine of bodily excitability, by contrast, fluids will not flow properly if the body’s motions are slowed down due to the nervous system’s insufficient excitability. Trotter argues that “listlessness and inactivity” can cause “[a]ll the secretions, and their excretories [to] fall into inaction from want of muscular motion” (Trotter 35-6). In turn, an excess or build up of fluid could cause either further sluggishness or a local irritation and overstimulation of the system, which could be calmed through various forms of purgation. More commonly, however, in practical medical texts like Buchan’s, adapted humoral pathologies and treatment methods are not theorized and are justified through the success stories of the individual practitioner.

and June of 1819. The list includes cathartics, such as scammony, gamboge, and aloe extract; antithelmics, such as artemesia and powder of tin; purgative calomel; diuretic saltpeter and digitalis; and sudorific camphor.⁸⁸ Bell was unable to save William with these treatments, and Shelley wrote *Matilda* while grieving his death.

In many medical texts, the bound or entrapped body I described earlier is dangerous to health precisely because it cannot release poisons. Trotter reminds his readers that the skin needs to remain clean, pores unclogged, and the skin “pervious” so that perspiration can flow unhindered (78). Buchan warns that “Anger, fear, grief, and other affections of the mind often occasion obstructions of the menstrual flux” which can be cured by exercise, open air, amusement, and change of scene (594-5). Buchan also insists that patients with “low spirits, hypochondriac or hysteric disorders” must be given food of “an opening nature” (Buchan 96) to combat constipation. For Thornton, melancholy is characterized by “torpor in the motion of the nervous power” because of a buildup of “mucous lining the intestines” (I 521). In addition to symptoms of a depressed state of excitability, like a “slow pulse” and “slow respiration,” he lists “constipation” and “decreased secretions” (I 518-9) as major problems.

The cure for these diseases is frequently purgative. Buchan cautiously recommends bleeding, purgatives, and vomits in some cases. Trotter is similarly cautious with respect to such treatments, but does nonetheless recommend emetics

⁸⁸ See *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, Vol. 1. The list of prescriptions is on pages 278-280. The editors translate Bell’s Latin terminology and provide an explanation of the standard use for each ingredient in the notes.

and purgatives to cleanse the system before beginning systematic treatment (307). Thornton calls for melancholics to be given emetics and cathartics, before having their vital powers restored by oxygen and exercise (I 517). In cases of madness, Cox argues that vomiting “takes the precedence of every other curative mean” (102) because it rids the body of the undigested food and mucous in the stomach that cause madness (41). He also recommends emetics (104) and diuretics (135) to cleanse the system, trepanning to relieve excess of blood in the head (96), warm baths to unblock pores (125), electrical treatment for “uterine obstruction” (136), and whirling in a swing to improve all secretions (144). Cox argues that the swing is particularly useful because it gets both bodily and mental juices flowing again, instigating a “revolution in the mind,” while also relieving “uterine obstructions” (175) and promoting healthful vomiting (142-3). Grief could also be treated using a purgative model. According to Buchan, opening up the mind to new sources of interest could operate like a mental laxative, as “travelling, the study of any art or science, reading, or writing . . . will sooner expel grief than the most sprightly amusements” (141-2).

Although Matilda begins her story by expressing a confused sense of its purpose, her insistent use of the language of pollution and catharsis implies that she may be writing as a way of purging herself of contamination. Her writing requires her to reopen her wound to let the infection out, a common nineteenth-century medical practice. In the weakness of her last illness, she is compelled to write: “a feeling that I cannot define leads me on and I am too weak both in body and mind to resist the slightest impulse” (151). She conceives of narration as a feverish opening up and pouring forth, an instinctive cleansing of contamination.

The embodied quality of this purgation is made clear when Matilda explains her wariness about telling her story until she is on her deathbed: “I thought indeed that there was a sacred horror in my tale that rendered it unfit for utterance, and now about to die I pollute its mystic terrors” (151). This Kantian and Burkean language of “sacred” and “mystic” terror links her untold tale to the sublime, a discourse in which the transcendence of materiality is the crucial step in accessing a higher reality. As I argued earlier, however, Matilda rejects the transcendentalizing impulse, which she sees as “fencing” Woodville “in,” rather than opening him up. She nonetheless evokes this transcendentalizing discourse to describe her untold tale; while the story remains untold, it too is fenced in, not only because it is secret, but also because it is severed from the embodied incestuous desire she refuses to articulate. The protected sublimity of her tale is therefore allied to the transcendent and “fenced in” (190) divinity Matilda finds so unsatisfying in Woodville. By telling her tale, she “pollutes” it; she secretes her poisonous bodily desire and knowledge into the tale itself, rendering it abject and transforming it into a form of negative sublimity. As Vine has argued, Shelley’s “sublime reinscribes traumatically the bodiliness or materiality that Kantian sublimity imperiously represses” (142). Instead of telling her story to transcend her grief, she is mysteriously impelled to plunge herself more deeply into it, a tendency that her use of infection and catharsis imagery links to the process of purgation. Her cure of sorts does not involve sewing up her wound, but rather ripping it open to let the pus ooze out. Though contemporary doctors conceived of this process as a precondition for healing, for Matilda, it is only a precondition for a more complete shattering of the constraints of selfhood, a process that

culminates in her death.

Though she imagines an “eternal mental union” (208) with her father, this ecstatic fantasy is not transcendently disembodied. She does initially seem to imply that she is leaving the earthly world to see her father in the spirit world when she says: “I go from this world where he is no longer and soon I shall meet him in another” (209). She reassures Woodville that “the turf will soon be green on my grave; and the violets will bloom on it. *There* is my hope and my expectation; yours are in this world; may they be fulfilled” (209). In this passage, the word “*There*” ostensibly refers to the other world where she will meet her father, but it seems very strange for Matilda to place her soul in a disembodied spirit world while lodging the transcendent Woodville on earth. Yet the word “*There*” comes directly after her description of the violets growing from her grave, rather than following her reference to the other world where she will meet her father. I read these lines as implying that Matilda’s transgression, trauma, purgation, and death have brought her into union with her father, and she allies their afterlife with the waste and regeneration of nature. Woodville’s expectations and hopes are in “this world,” which is not the world of nature and of the living, but instead the world of imagination and narrative voice through which she speaks to him. The syntactical slippage between these two worlds is important, however, as she blurs the distinctions between them.

Her fantasies of the afterlife are Dantean in quality, but she obscures spirit-body boundaries here as well by linking this otherworldly Paradise to the natural world. She fantasizes about meeting her father in “some sweet Paradise. I pictured to myself a lovely river such as that on whose banks Dante describes

Matilda gathering flowers . . . I thought how, of the lovely flowers that grew there, I would wind myself a chaplet and crown myself for joy” (205). Life and afterlife are linked as Matilda’s Dantean flowers recall the violets she hopes will grow on her grave. The physical world becomes the spirit world, and vice versa, in the “*terrestrial Paradise*” she pictures to herself (205, emphasis mine). Of course, Matilda does not invent the term “*terrestrial paradise*” to represent the embodied spirituality she envisages. Her use of this term is taken from Dante’s “*terrestrial Paradise*,” which he locates on the mountain of Purgatory. Dante ascends from this realm with Beatrice on the light of her eyes. Though Matilda borrows the scene from Dante, she modifies it to insist upon the embodied nature of her desires. She does not fantasize an ascension away from the terrestrial and towards the spiritual realm, and instead locates her fantasy union in the earthly paradise of Purgatory. Even in her vision of the afterlife, then, she continues to reject the imprisoning and hierarchizing tendencies of transcendental thought.

By locating her fantasy reunion with her father in Purgatory, where her Dantean namesake appears on the banks of the cleansing river Lethe, Matilda continues the purgation she enacts through her tale. The opening up of body and soul that Purgatory implies furthers the traumatic dissolution of boundaries and destruction of hierarchical roles enacted earlier in the text. Individual boundaries disappear, as she and her father become Matilda and Dante, meeting on the banks of the Lethe as Matilda gathers flowers. Then, in a gender role reversal, they become Dante and Beatrice, as Matilda’s father descends on a Beatricean “car of light” and looks at his newly arrived Dantean daughter/lover with beams of love (205). She imagines reuniting with Woodville as well: “I thought of Woodville

with gratitude and kindness I walked on wondering when the time would come when we should all four, my dearest father restored to me, meet in some sweet Paradise” (205). Their fourth companion could be either Matilda’s mother Diana or Woodville’s dead fiancée Elinor. In the end, it does not really matter since boundaries of personality have been destroyed, just as Matilda and her father’s shared moment of traumatic shock broke the boundaries separating them. This trauma fused their nervous systems and opened up a channel for the communication of infection and poison from one to the other. Although Matilda closed herself off temporarily in her melancholic grief, her fantasy of complete union in Purgatory implies that her purgative writing has the potential to link her not only to her father, but to her mother, Woodville, Elinor, and Diana, and to the spiritual and natural worlds. Purgation breaks these boundaries down completely.

Though Matilda’s and Woodville’s afterlife reunion will have to wait, she implies that Woodville’s memory of her, and the tale that she leaves for him, will begin this purgatorial unification. She writes to Woodville that his “heart is the only tomb in which my memory will be interred” (209). This strange image evokes the complications in their relationship. Separated from Woodville by a case of stone, Matilda nonetheless penetrates him. He will eventually penetrate her as well, as the worm-filled soil in which a coffin is buried inevitably breaks through its barriers. Though Woodville did not pour a healing balm into her in life, she ultimately pushes her way into him in death, and invites him to do the same with her. By telling him her story, she achieves the intimacy she desires; she is granted her wish “for one heart in which I could pour unrestrained my complaints” (190). She therefore also passes her pollution on to him. If telling her story can

“pollute its mystic terrors” (151), if it has the power to turn sublimity into abjection, and binding into unbinding, then Matilda may traumatize Woodville in the process, breaking through the protective barriers of transcendence he keeps around himself. Matilda thinks he keeps himself “fenced” off from humanity by imagining it as better than it is (190), and this horrifying tale has the power to free him from this isolating self-spiritualization. Her story will confront him with embodiment and with a suffering that cannot easily be made poetic. Matilda therefore forces on Woodville the traumatic and horrifying release from individuation that she experienced. Since the implied readers of this tale are placed in Woodville’s position, Matilda invades them in similar ways.

Instead of providing her readers with a road map for the achievement of socially integrated individualism, or charting the process by which psychological pain can be overcome in the process of maturation and identity-formation, Matilda details with precision how her traumatic experience destroys her, shattering her sense of self and ruining her for normative social relations. Yet her father’s shocking confession of incestuous desire nonetheless releases her from the socially integrated individuation that once imprisoned her. She does not heal, nor does her poisonous trauma disappear. She dies of an open wound, and the writing she leaves behind her continues the boundary-breaking traumatizing process that both destroyed and liberated her.

This process is presented ambivalently in the novel, however. Matilda is drawn into a destructive incestuous dynamic with a father who destroys her psychologically by confessing his desire and then killing himself. Matilda clings to this experience because moving beyond it would seem to her like a betrayal of

her experience and her love. Matilda elevates her traumatic experience to the level of a religious epiphany, but she does so only because of her utter dissatisfaction with the normative healthful models of selfhood and sociability promoted by her culture. As I argue in this dissertation as a whole, nineteenth-century trauma novels demonstrate that the experience of trauma emerges from and relies upon the model of personal identity that Norbert Elias describes as the “self in a case.” In demonstrating that a trauma that rips Matilda to pieces is the only escape she can find from this atomized identity, Shelley reveals the problematic implications of modern Western selfhood.

CHAPTER 3

Dangerous Retellings: Traumatic History and the Imprisoned Psyche in *A Tale of Two Cities*

Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* is fixated on suffering and its consequences. The Marquis St. Evrémonde carelessly kills a small child, as the child's horror-stricken father, Gaspard, looks on. The Evrémonde brothers brutalize Madame Defarge's entire family: her brother-in-law is worked to death; her sister is raped; her brother is killed in an unfair duel; and her father dies of grief. The Evrémondes also imprison the innocent Dr. Manette for twenty years. In the aftermath of this brutality, Gaspard murders Evrémonde, Madame Defarge plots and instigates mass revolutionary violence, and Manette reverts continuously to a kind of mental prison cell. These victimized characters are locked in repetitive re-enactments of their suffering, just as all of revolutionary France is doomed to repeat the violence and injustice that characterized the *ancien régime*.

For the main characters in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the suffering they endure threatens the self-determining, bourgeois identity they value. After Dr. Manette is released from prison, he settles in England and tries to move past his painful experiences. He establishes a medical practice and finds fulfillment in domestic life with his daughter, Lucie, and a small circle of friends. Charles Darnay, a former French aristocrat, also moves to England in an attempt to leave *ancien régime* injustice behind. Darnay's industriousness and earnest dedication to British middle-class values win him an honest living and Lucie's hand. Yet,

despite these characters' attempts at building happy lives, their harmonious blending of domestic bliss and professional success is threatened continually by the return of damaging psychological states and by the repetitive re-enactment of violence. As is the case in the other trauma novels I examine in this dissertation, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, inassimilable suffering repeatedly thwarts the *bildungsroman*, domestic, and marriage plots. This evasion of healing and closure is no longer presented positively or even ambivalently, as it is in *Matilda*, however. Dickens's characters cannot move toward their happy endings because the violence always returns. This recurring violence also blocks the social progress that historical novels, in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott, often present as inevitable.⁸⁹ In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the elimination of the cruel French aristocracy does seem inevitable, but Dickens insists that the revolutionary government that follows it is equally barbaric. History repeats itself in this novel, blocking the progressive teleology of the *bildungsroman* and marriage plot and defying the triumphalist vision of progressive history.

Despite its resistance to historical linearity, the novel nonetheless engages with the practice and purpose of history as understood by many prominent Victorian historians, such as Thomas Carlyle and Thomas Arnold, who used the contemporary "science of history" to explain the cyclical repetitions they saw in the past. This chapter traces the way Dickens adapts these cyclical models of history to map a psycho-historical process, a relationship between individual

⁸⁹ As I explain in more detail below, critics have frequently examined Scott's stadialist view that cultures progress inevitably through the same stages of development, from the relatively barbaric (though heroic) to the civilized.

psychology and social movements that is responsible for historical events.⁹⁰

Dickens analyses the historical process as a doctor analyses a patient, tracing the chronic symptoms of disease back to originary causes. He diagnoses political violence as symptomatic of horrendous social conditions: his characters are so warped by oppression that they become incapable of anything other than mindless, repetitive violence.⁹¹ I argue that the novel's understanding of this psychosocial disease emerges from Victorian Associationist psychology and its treatment of habit as a mental prison. Dickens's characters are trapped in destructive cognitive patterns that govern the life of the individual and the nation. *A Tale of Two Cities* therefore grounds its science of history in the individual experiences of suffering and trauma.⁹²

This chapter also highlights the importance that *A Tale of Two Cities* gives to social class in mediating the experience of suffering, and in determining the course of history. I contrast Dickens's depictions of middle-class trauma and

⁹⁰ Clare A. Simmons also maintains that the repetition in the novel should be understood in the context of nineteenth-century ideas about history, but she focuses solely on the way Dickens negotiates between the Tory model of history as repetition and the Whig model of history as progress, without analyzing the psychological dimension that determines this repetition. Patrick Brantlinger describes Dickens' formulation of a philosophy of history as a "thoughtful effort to understand the relationship of the collective or societal past to the present and future" ("Did Dickens Have" 61). Brantlinger calls Dickens's philosophy of history "grotesque populism" and focuses on the tension between the novel's location of political authority in the people and Dickens's sense that the people are so distorted as to act against their own interests (61).

⁹¹ In a similar vein, Andrew Sanders claims that "Dickens is attempting demonstrate his theory that history is a pattern of causes and effects, of repression which breeds further repression and oppression which fosters worse oppression" (152). Sanders does not expand upon this notion, which he sees as an "uncomplicated, even unsubtle, theory of history" (152).

⁹² For a psychoanalytic analysis of Dickens's depiction of trauma in *A Tale of Two Cities*, see Albert D. Hutter's "Nation and Generation in *A Tale of Two Cities*." Hutter connects the repetition in the novel to the psychoanalytic understanding of trauma: "Manette's story is the narrative equivalent of a trauma: it recalls an event that precedes all the other action of the novel and organizes that action, although it is not 'recovered' until quite late in the novel" (449). Despite this similarity, I argue that the novel's depiction of repression and repetition emerges more clearly from Victorian medical theories about the effects of shock and grief.

working-class suffering to highlight the role that personal boundaries play in determining how characters experience and re-enact emotional pain. As described in my introduction, in the late-eighteenth century, the “self in a case” or *homo clausus* model of individual identity came to dominate middle-class self-conception. In the nineteenth century, both novelistic and medical discourses frequently cast intense psychological pain as a threat to the boundaries of individual identity. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that nineteenth-century trauma novels, like *Matilda* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, identify this bound, bourgeois subjectivity as the precondition for trauma. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, middle-class characters, in particular, experience suffering as traumatic because it threatens the individuated and autonomous identity they value. Dr. Manette therefore tries to hide the after-effects of his imprisonment in the Bastille, internalizing and psychologizing his repetitive patterns of emotional response, locking himself up in a prison of his own construction. In contrast, working-class characters treat their suffering as the foundation of class solidarity. Their identities are inter-subjective, so they have no trouble sharing stories about the abuse and oppression they endure. These stories bind them to one another and lead them to re-enact their violent histories in mass political revenge.

Through this contrast, *A Tale of Two Cities* reveals the psychological dangers of both modes of experiencing suffering. Bound subjectivity makes trauma unspeakable, and this silence traps the middle-class subject in an isolated psychological prison. Unbound subjectivity instead normalizes the shared endurance and narration of suffering, and the violent stories lower-class characters share lock them in cycles of revenge. Stories about violence promote historical

repetition; yet keeping silent about abuse divorces human suffering from the lived experience that makes it comprehensible, thereby giving stories about this violence more power once they are inevitably revealed. This extended contrast in the characters' reactions to their painful personal histories, and of their decisions about how or whether to narrate them, serves as a self-reflexive interrogation of the psychological and ethical consequences of historical writing. History books and historical novels are both filled with accounts of intense human pain and therefore could, by implication, have an effect on the psychology of readers and on the historical process. I argue that the ending of *A Tale of Two Cities* blends a variety of narrative forms to open up the possibility for characters and readers to break out of the parallel prisons of bourgeois internalization and working class externalization of violence.

i. Dickens and the Nineteenth-Century Science of History

My assertion that *A Tale of Two Cities* engages with the Victorian science of history clashes with the common critical contention that the novel is anti-historical in its outlook. Georg Lukács, for instance, accuses Dickens of denying the historical particularity of human psychology and instead universalizing human nature (64). In a similar vein, Elliot L. Gilbert contends that *A Tale of Two Cities* is “anti-historical” because it engages in “anachronism” (259) and because the novel’s cyclical and repetitive structure “necessarily rejects the vision of life as a linear progress through time, in one direction only and without possibility of return, a vision that is the unavoidable first assumption of historical science” (259). There is, of course, some truth to these assertions. Though the novel makes

very clear that the historical conditions in pre-revolutionary France produced a particular psychology and set of behaviours, it also draws parallels to and derives lessons for nineteenth-century society. The warning the narrator offers towards the end of the novel encapsulates this tension between historical particularity and contemporary relevance: “Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms” (459). On the one hand, this line implies a deterministic view of history: social context shapes human character as a blacksmith shapes metal. Yet in another sense, the narrator is claiming that the same historical context and events could recur, that history will repeat itself if readers do not take the novel’s lessons to heart.

Despite this idea that historical conditions, and the psychology they produce, can recur over time, *A Tale of Two Cities* does engage with Victorian historiographic models. In charging Dickens with anachronism, Lukács judges Victorian writing by the standards of earlier Romantic historiography, as exemplified by Walter Scott, whose technique of linking character psychology to social context Lukács admires.⁹³ In contrast, Gilbert’s assessment of *A Tale of Two Cities* is based on a teleological understanding of what historical science would become in the later nineteenth century. Gilbert is correct in his assertion that the nineteenth century was “a time when history had just begun to come into its own as an intellectual and academic discipline, as a truly rigorous inquiry into the past” (248), but this linear, scientific, and detached model of historiography

⁹³ Lukács classifies Scott as “classical” rather than Romantic, but I use the term Romantic here and elsewhere to signify the early nineteenth century generally and the historiographic preference for imaginative immersion in the *milieu* and mindset of the past, more specifically. See below for John Stuart Mill’s analysis of the “Romantic” phase of history writing, on which I have based my understanding of the term.

only took firm hold in late nineteenth-century Britain. Instead, many early- to mid-nineteenth-century historical thinkers sought to revivify historical events in order to apply their lessons in a contemporary context. When Victorian historical thinkers did concern themselves with what they called a “science of history,” like Dickens, they were often interested in illuminating the forces behind the cyclical recurrences they saw in the past.

Such forces were of interest to many historians because of the guidance they could offer for parallel contemporary political decisions. For Thomas Babington Macaulay, for instance, one of the historian’s primary tasks is to determine why revolutions happened in order to learn how to avoid them in future (Culler 34-5, Kenyon 83). This reasoning implies that historical patterns could repeat themselves. Indeed, Dickens’s warning to his readers not to crush humanity into the same tortured forms as those that led to the French revolution has much in common with Macaulay’s speech in support of the first Reform Bill: “Woe to the Government which thinks that a great, a steady, a long continued movement of the public mind is to be stopped like a street riot! This error has been twice fatal to the great House of Bourbon. God be praised, our rulers have been wiser” (*Speeches* 35). Though lacking Macaulay’s optimism, Dickens’s opening comparison between the French and English and past and present has essentially the same cautionary aim.⁹⁴

John Stuart Mill’s 1844 review of Jules Michelet’s *Histoire de France* is

⁹⁴ J.W. Burrows attributes this nineteenth-century “habit of drawing [historical] parallels” in part to contemporary educational practices, noting that the “Cambridge Union, in Macaulay’s time, was allowed to debate only the public questions of previous centuries. Naturally, historical parallels were eagerly sought” (15).

particularly helpful in distinguishing between the anachronism Victorians like Mill saw in pre-Romantic historiography, and their belief in the legitimate use of history to understand contemporary society. According to Mill, historical scholarship passes through three phases. In the first, the historian engages in the kind of anachronism Lukács and Gilbert see in *A Tale of Two Cities*:

The character of this school is to transport present feelings and notions back into the past, and refer all ages and forms of human life to the standard of that in which the writer himself lives In this manner they antedate not only modern ideas, but the essential characters of the modern mind, and imagine their ancestors to be very like their next neighbours, saving a few eccentricities, occasioned by being still Pagans or Catholics, by having no *habeas corpus* act, and no Sunday schools. (Mill 5-6)

Early in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the tongue-in-cheek quip that a particular waiter behaves “[a]ccording to the immemorial usage of waiters in all ages” (21) parodies this anachronizing tendency. Dickens’s ironic portrait of a modern waiter as an unchanging type transcending human memory thus serves to differentiate Dickens’s own project from the anachronistic transpositions of the present onto the past that Mill identifies as characteristic of the first phase of historical scholarship. Mill goes on to explain that, by contrast, in the second or “Romantic” phase, the historian “attempts to regard former ages not with the eye of a modern, but as far as possible, with that of a contemporary” (6). This is the kind of perspective Lukács praises in Scott’s novels, and that he criticizes Dickens for lacking. While Mill values this kind of work, he does not see it as the pinnacle of

historical writing.

Instead, for Mill, the final and most important phase involves the attempt “to construct a science of history” in which “the whole of the events which have befallen the human race, and the states through which it has passed, are regarded as a series of phenomena, produced by causes, and susceptible of explanation”

(7). According to Mill, in the science of history,

The facts of each generation are looked upon as one complex phenomenon, caused by those of the generation preceding, and causing, in its turn, those of the next in order. That these states must follow one another according to some law, is considered certain: how to read that law, is deemed the fundamental problem of the science of history. To find on what principles, derived from the nature of man and the system of the universe, each state of society and of the human mind produced that which came after it; and whether there can be traced any order of production sufficiently definite, to show what future states of society may be expected to emanate from the circumstances which exist at present—is the aim of historical philosophy in its third stage. (7)

Mill does not consider the historical novel in his analysis but, as I argue in detail below, Dickens articulates this kind of science of history in *A Tale of Two Cities* by examining the effect of psychological suffering on the historical process.

Although Dickens may not have consciously formulated the kind of programmatic theory Mill was seeking, his novel nonetheless communicates an understanding of the historical process that is informed by contemporary methods.

A survey of nineteenth-century theories of historical change clarifies the representational and conceptual traditions *A Tale of Two Cities* builds on and modifies. Mill refers briefly to Thomas Arnold's attempt to formulate a science of history (8), and in his "Essay on the Social Progress of States" (1830), Arnold identifies the laws he believes determine the historical process. He argues that all civilizations pass through the same phases of development, which he sees as analogous to the phases of an individual human life or to the seasons of the year. This notion that cultures pass through similar developmental stages in their progress towards civilization was fairly widespread in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and dominated many early attempts at a science of history. Some historians, such as Arnold, grounded it in a cyclical conception of history, while others relied on a linear structure. Enlightenment stadialist thinkers (such as Walter Scott's professor William Robertson) and nineteenth-century philosophers of history (like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel or Auguste Comte) relied upon a linear model, in which the advance of civilization progresses in one direction only.⁹⁵ Like the *bildungsroman*, which plots the growth and development of an individual human, these models of history plot the growth and development of an entire culture.⁹⁶

Critics have frequently noted the influence of such linear stadialist theories

⁹⁵ For an analysis of Robertson's historical philosophy, including a brief description of his influence on Scott, see Stuart J. Brown's *William J. Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*. For an explication of Hegel's philosophy of history, see Will Dudley's *Hegel and History*. For an analysis of the history of the notion of progress, including Comte's attitude to historical development, see Robert A. Nisbet's *History of the Idea of Progress*.

⁹⁶ For more on the link between such tales of "individual and collective emergence" (285), see Tobias Boes, "Apprenticeship of the Novel: The *Bildungsroman* and the Invention of History, ca. 1770-1820."

on Scott's historical novels. Katie Trumpener argues that in these novels, "one developmental stage collapses to make room for the next and cultures are transformed under the pressure of historical events" (141). In *Waverley*, for instance, different geographical regions in the north of Britain exist in contrasting stages of human development. Jeffrey Scraba has described the common critical view that "the hunting/savage Highlands, the agricultural/barbaric Lowlands, and the commercial/civilized metropolis" represent differing stages of civilization: "The plot involves, from the privileged perspective of historical hindsight, the inevitable triumph of the highly civilized British commercial society and the inexorable tragic end of the savage Highland society."⁹⁷ *Waverley*'s *bildungsroman* plot charts its protagonist's parallel growth and development as he comes to accept and integrate himself into this new order. Both the historical and personal plots are governed by the notion of developmental stages, gleaned from contemporary historical science.

A Tale of Two Cities might be said to contain elements of this model, as Dickens compares France, still in its feudal/aristocratic stage, to the more advanced, capitalist/constitutional England. Darnay's abandonment of France for England, the fall of the French monarchy, and the survival of British institutions like Tellson's Bank could all be read as implying the inevitability of historical progress from one developmental phase to another. Darnay's own *bildungsroman* plot runs parallel to this story of historical progress, as *Waverley*'s did in Scott's novel. When Darnay moves to England, he leaves his aristocratic privilege behind

⁹⁷ Although Scraba agrees with this general schema, he argues that Scott "bring[s] the idea of simple progress back into the messy and contingent world of human accident."

him in France, and adopts bootstrapping, English, middle-class industry. His personal growth and modernity are rewarded with financial comfort and domestic happiness. *A Tale of Two Cities* nonetheless defies any simple progressive teleology in either the romantic or political plots. The forward momentum of the progressive historical novel and *bildungsroman* are both undercut by the novel's circularity. Harvest and seasonal imagery run throughout the text, signalling a cyclical rather than linear notion of time. And in a violent and repetitive regression, Darnay, Manette, and Lucie are forced to return to France in the middle of the novel. The violence of France, and of the old order it represents, cannot easily be left behind.⁹⁸

As I argued earlier, despite the fairly widespread belief in the linear progress of history and in the inevitable movement of cultures from one developmental stage to another, many nineteenth-century historians, such as Arnold, insisted on a cyclical model of historical recurrence. *A Tale of Two Cities* follows in this tradition, and an understanding of these cyclical models thus challenges the notion that the novel's resistance to a progressive narrative structure makes it "anti-historical" in spirit. John Kenyon points out that, in the early nineteenth century, "It was fashionable to suppose that history was cyclic, and the Italian [Giovanni Battista] Vico and the German [Barthold Georg] Niebuhr even regarded the state as a living organism, undergoing a process of

⁹⁸ As John D. Rosenberg points out, "In current usage the word revolution denotes violent political upheaval, sudden disjunctions in ways of life or modes of thought. We tend to forget an almost contrary sense of revolution signifying a regular rotation around a fixed point, a cycle" (29).

birth, growth, decline, death and rebirth” (65).⁹⁹ Arnold’s theory of historical repetition was based on a reinterpretation of Vico’s philosophy of history in *La Scienza Nuova*, and in particular of his repeating Ages of Gods, Heroes, and Men (Culler 81-5). Thomas Carlyle’s philosophy of history was gleaned in large part from German thinkers, and in particular, from Goethe’s schema of cyclical alternating epochs of “belief” and “unbelief”.¹⁰⁰ Mill and Carlyle were also interested in Vico, and were attracted to the philosophy of history of the French Saint Simonians, who posited a similarly cyclical vision of history passing through alternating “organic” and “critical” periods. In fact, A. Dwight Culler argues that Saint-Simonian philosophy structures Carlyle’s *French Revolution* (50-63), arguably Dickens’s most important source for *A Tale of Two Cities*.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Jules Michelet, whose work Mill reviews in his essay on the science of history, was also a staunch Vician, and announced in the preface to *Histoire de France* “je n’eus de maître que Vico” (ix). He did, however, convert Vico’s recurring cycles into a progressive spiral, an “expanding and contracting gyre” (Hutton 247). Mill also eventually turned away from a purely cyclical vision of history because of his belief in progress. See below for an analysis of the way in which Dickens adopts a similarly spiral structure as an alternative to historical recurrence.

¹⁰⁰ For a more detailed analysis of Carlyle’s engagement with German philosophies of history, see Culler, pp. 46-7. Culler argues that in *Sartor Resartus*, Teufelsdröckh echoes Goethe’s schematic when he asks,

If our era is the Era of Unbelief, why murmur under it; is there not a better coming, nay come? As in long-drawn systole and long-drawn diastole, must the period of Faith alternate with the period of Denial; must the vernal growth, the summer luxuriance of all Opinions, Spiritual Representations and Creations, be followed by, and again follow, the autumnal decay, the winter dissolution. (69)

¹⁰¹ In the preface to *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens claims that “no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr. Carlyle’s wonderful book” (xxvii). Carlyle also famously sent Dickens a cart-load of books to help him in his research for *A Tale of Two Cities*, as Mill had done for Carlyle himself, when Carlyle was writing *The French Revolution*. For the influence of Carlyle on Dickens, see Branwen Bailey Pratt, “Carlyle and Dickens: Heroes and Hero-Worshippers;” H. M. Daleski, “Imagining Revolution: The Eye of History and of Fiction;” Elliott Gilbert, “To Awake From History: Carlyle, Thackeray, and *A Tale of Two Cities*,” Michael Goldberg, *Carlyle and Dickens* and “Carlyle, Dickens, and the Revolution of 1848;” Carol Hanbery MacKay, “The Rhetoric of Soliloquy in *The French Revolution* and *A Tale of Two Cities*,” David D. Marcus, “The Carlylean Vision of *A Tale of Two Cities*,” William Oddie, *Dickens and Carlyle: The Question of Influence*; Michael Timko, “Splendid impressions and picturesque means: Dickens,

Clearly, many early Victorian historical thinkers thus conceived of history as a cyclical rather than linear process and believed that the historian's role was to illuminate the forces causing historical change and recurrence. *A Tale of Two Cities* reflects this trend in contemporary historical thought. It would be tempting, therefore, to argue that Dickens's use of this cyclical structure allies him to a conservative model of history. While the linear model of historical stages tends to be ideologically liberal in the sense that it emphasizes progress in the life of the individual and nation, cyclical models of historical writing often imply conservative ideals, emphasizing the continuity that exists even during periods of change.¹⁰² Dickens resists both these models, however. He depicts historical repetition in such a way as to challenge what Scott saw as the inevitability of linear progress, but he does not present this repetition as a reassuring, natural, or organic process.¹⁰³ Indeed, he pathologizes repetition because it arrests the kind of healthy progress and development generally charted in Scott's historical novels and in the *bildungsroman*. Dickens's characters are stuck in violent cycles, not because such cycles are natural, but because the characters are psychologically damaged. He writes a science of history that identifies the cognitive basis of

Carlyle, and the French Revolution;" and Chris R. Vanden Bossche "Prophetic Closure and Disclosing Narrative: *The French Revolution* and *A Tale of Two Cities*."

¹⁰² Such conservatism could of course, be radical in nature, as in the writing of Carlyle or the Saint Simonians. For more on the political implications of historical emplotment, see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* and *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*.

¹⁰³ This tendency nevertheless allies Dickens and Scott, who both express aesthetic and moral reservations about the historical models that structure their narratives. Just as Scott presents historical progress as a regrettable inevitability, in light of his nostalgic attachment to the past, Dickens presents historical reversion as equally disturbing and unavoidable. Scott seems to want time to stand still, even though it must inevitably move forward, while Dickens appears to desire progress, even though history must repeat itself.

historical change.

ii. Cognitive Habits and the Repetitive Re-Enactment of Suffering

A Tale of Two Cities nonetheless departs from most historical philosophy by paying attention to the connection between psychology and social movements. Marcus notes the similarity of the novel to Carlyle's writing because of "the connection that it draws between the social and the psychic dimensions of historical crisis; the humane man finds himself caught in the mechanism of historical processes that move according to their own laws and that destroy any possibility of useful action" (57). Yet Dickens not only represents the psychological effect of historical laws, but also moves beyond Carlyle to suggest that historical laws are psychological laws. Although this inter-implication of the social and the psychological was not common in historical philosophy, it nevertheless runs through nineteenth-century psychological and medical texts. As Sally Shuttleworth explains:

The rhetoric of the nineteenth century insistently linked the political health of a nation and its psychological state. With the increase of political and social agitation in England in the 1840s, [psychological] theorists such as [John] Barlow reiterated the accepted dogma that insanity increased 'to a frightful extent' with the French Revolution. . . . Lunacy offers an ever-changing relief map of the social body. Far from being the excluded, outside term, lunacy has become the interiorized space of society; to understand the workings of its hidden recesses is to hold the key to social

knowledge. (*Charlotte Brontë* 48)

I argue that Dickens similarly grounds his science of history in the contemporary science of cognition, and in particular, in Associationist and related physiological theories of habit.

Although George Henry Lewes famously criticized Dickens for his lack of attention to contemporary scientific knowledge (and Dickens did frequently champion pseudo-scientific and popular theories against the scientific consensus),¹⁰⁴ Dickens's interest in Victorian medical and psychological theories is well established. In *Household Words*, he printed articles about scientific topics, including Percival Leigh's rewrites of Professor Michael Faraday's popular science lecture series in 1850-1851 (Melville). He wrote his own articles about medical and psychological subjects, as well. In "A Curious Dance Round A Curious Tree" (1852), he describes his visit to an insane asylum, assessing the benefits of modern and humane approaches over what he describes as the barbarous treatment methods of the past. Dickens's social circle and philanthropic connections included a number of medical men, through whom he would have been exposed to contemporary scientific thought. The Victorian scientist John Elliotson was Dickens's personal friend, and though Elliotson's reputation was shattered as his mesmeric theories were discredited, Dickens nonetheless relied on him as a scientific authority. Thanks to Elliotson, Dickens became an amateur

¹⁰⁴ In an 1852 column, Lewes publicly criticized *Bleak House* for its unscientific depiction of spontaneous combustion. Dickens responded in the next number of *Household Words* by citing his scientific authorities. A heated exchange followed over the next several months, as Lewes challenged the veracity and credibility of Dickens's sources and as Dickens defended himself. For an overview of this debate, complete with selections from the key articles and letters written by the two men, see Gordon S. Haight, "Dickens and Lewes on Spontaneous Combustion."

mesmerist himself, and conducted a series of experiments in mesmeric treatment on his neighbour, Augusta de la Rue, a woman who suffered from a number of nervous ailments (Bodenheimer 11).¹⁰⁵

Dickens also had access to key eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific texts. Rosemarie Bodenheimer points out that his personal library contained “over thirty books on the workings of the mind, ranging from contemporary studies in physiological psychology to miscellanies on the spirit world” (7). Bodenheimer admits that many of these texts were presentation copies, and so one cannot assume that Dickens necessarily read them, but he was certainly immersed in a context in which such ideas were widely available. In terms of specifically Associationist texts, he owned copies of Dugald Stewart’s influential *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792) and John Abercrombie’s *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and Investigation of Truth* (1843).¹⁰⁶ Michael S. Kearns argues that Associationist theories like these dominate Dickens’s writing: “Although Dickens never declared his allegiance to association psychology, both the language and the concepts of this psychology are so prominent in his character portrayals that he can fairly be termed an association novelist” (158-9).¹⁰⁷ Kearns does not examine *A Tale of Two Cities*, but as I argue

¹⁰⁵ For more on Dickens and mesmerism, see Fred Kaplan, *Dickens and Mesmerism: The Hidden Springs of Fiction* and Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*.

¹⁰⁶ For a complete inventory of the books in Dickens’s library upon his death, see John Harrison Stonehouse’s *Catalogue of the library of Charles Dickens from Gadshill*.

¹⁰⁷ In “Defining Habits: Dickens and the Psychology of Repetition,” Athena Vrettos analyses several of Dickens’ other novels’ in the context of nineteenth-century scientific understandings of repetition, but she focuses primarily on the work of late nineteenth-century psychological thinkers, such as William James. Though Vrettos and Kearns both argue that Dickens was an Association

below, this novel does make extensive use of Associationist language, like “train of thought” and “associations,” in order to describe the effect of intense suffering on the mind.

Dickens relies on the doctrine of Associationism and related neurological theories of habit in order to explain the mechanisms that cause personal and historical repetition. Associationist psychologists argued that intense or powerful impressions can trap people in cognitive prisons of repetition. In a similar vein, *A Tale of Two Cities* presents the violence of the French Revolution and Reign of Terror as symptoms of the mental and physical damage caused by the *ancien régime*. The central personal and political conflicts of the novel stem from two instances of abuse, both of which engender repetitive re-enactments. Dr. Manette is unjustly imprisoned and kept in solitary confinement in the Bastille for over twenty years and, while there, turns to compulsive shoemaking as a way of retaining his sanity. When he leaves prison, and even after he regains a semblance of a normal life, any stress or reminder of his former situation propels him into dissociated repetitive shoemaking fugues. Manette’s imprisonment comes as a result of an earlier chain of events whose effects he witnesses and insists upon exposing. The aristocratic Evrémonde brothers work a young peasant man to death so that one of them can be free to rape the young man’s unprotected widow. Her father then dies of grief and her brother is fatally wounded in a duel he fights with her rapist. After this string of violations, the Evrémondes call Dr. Manette in to attend the hysterical young girl, who is mentally trapped in the moment of her

husband's death:

Her eyes were dilated and wild, and she constantly uttered piercing shrieks, and repeated the words, 'my husband, my father, and my brother!' and then counted up to twelve, and said 'Hush!' For an instant, and no more, she would pause to listen, and then the piercing shrieks would begin again, and she would repeat the cry . . . There was no variation in the order, or the manner. (397)

These disjointed, repetitive cries become comprehensible when Dr. Manette discovers that her husband died at noon, sobbing twelve times, once for each ringing of the bell (402).

The most dedicated revolutionary figure in the book, the cold and calculating Thérèse Defarge, is later identified as the younger sister of this tortured widow. Madame Defarge engages in compulsive, repetitive knitting, and the novel eventually reveals that she is knitting a coded list of aristocrats and other wrongdoers whom she and other revolutionaries will punish for their crimes. Once the Revolution begins, Madame Defarge unleashes mass violence against the aristocracy and takes pleasure in the suffering of anyone even vaguely connected to the aristocratic class who hurt her family. She also establishes a corrupt court that serves the interests of the revolutionaries now in power. Though the revolutionaries overthrow the aristocracy and establish a new form of government, the new political order reflects and repeats the suffering of the

past.¹⁰⁸ Madame Defarge mechanically enacts a revenge that parallels the oppression of the *ancien régime*. Her plot to engineer the conviction, imprisonment, and execution of Evrémonde's innocent son Darnay, along with his wife and child, and the perverse joy she takes in her own power of destruction, make her a double for Evrémonde himself. Although Dr. Manette is one of the novel's heroes and Madame Defarge its main villain, the compulsiveness of her vengeful knitting corresponds to Manette's shoemaking, and neither character has any control over the mechanical repetition of horrors that have imprinted themselves indelibly on their psyches.¹⁰⁹

Dr. Manette's shoemaking compulsion, Madame Defarge's compulsive knitting, and her sister's grief-stricken and hysterical re-enactment of the moment of her husband's death all illustrate the Associationist idea that certain powerful impressions, and the associated modes of coping with them, can so engrain themselves on the brain as to become automatic and unavoidable. The eighteenth-century doctrine of Associationism, articulated in part by John Locke, David

¹⁰⁸ Gilbert sees Madame Defarge as a writer of history, who is as "obsessed with genealogy as the most unreconstructed patriarchal aristocrat, wholly committed, like that aristocrat, to judging her fellow human beings not by their abilities or by their actions . . . but entirely by their birth" (260). He claims that Madame Defarge and other revolutionaries capitulate to history, while the novel itself postulates the desirability of a cyclical mythic time as an escape from it. While Gilbert is correct in his assertion that Madame Defarge is controlled by history, he seems unaware of the way in which the history Madame Defarge writes and enacts is itself just as cyclical as the mythic resurrection he argues Dickens puts forth as an alternative to it.

¹⁰⁹ In contrast to Dickens's suggestion that negative cognitive habits lead to revolutionary violence, in *The French Revolution*, Carlyle casts habit as that which keeps violence and chaos at bay:

Rash enthusiast of Change, beware! Hast thou well considered all that Habit does in this life of ours; how . . . our whole being is, an infinite abyss, overarched by Habit, as by a thin Earth-rind, laboriously built together? . . . [L]et but . . . your 'thin Earth-rind' be once broken! The fountains of the great deep boil forth; fire-fountains, enveloping, engulfing. Your Earth-rind is shattered, swallowed up; instead of a green flowery world there is a waste wild-weltering chaos. (I: 49)

Hume, and Thomas Hobbes and further refined by David Hartley, was an attempt to explain how impressions are transformed into thoughts, which then in turn automatically suggest new thoughts. Hartley argues that thoughts follow the patterns established by previous impressions and associations. For instance, the sight of a bottle of medicine could cause one to screw up the face in disgust because it recalls to the mind the previously associated horrible taste of the medicine (111). The more times one experiences the bottle and the bad taste together, the more habitual one's thoughts and reactions to them become.

Victorian physiologists frequently incorporated and adapted eighteenth-century philosophical Associationism into their theories of automatic and instinctive mental functions. For example, in *Principles of Human Physiology* (1859), William Benjamin Carpenter outlines the way in which “Previously-acquired Habits . . . automatically incite us to do as we have been before accustomed to do under the like circumstances, without the idea of prospective pleasure or pain, or of right or wrong, being at all present to our minds” (606).¹¹⁰ Similarly, in *Senses and Intellect* (1855), the physiologist Alexander Bain ties Associationist ideas to Victorian physiological theories about the conservation of energy:

Everything that we have ever done, we have a disposition or tendency to repeat; but usually the disposition is too feeble to assert itself freely, without some aiding circumstances. . . . [O]ne mode of opening up the crowd to allow this past state to re-assert

¹¹⁰ All references to Carpenter's work in this chapter are to the 1859 edition of *Principles of Human Physiology*.

itself . . . is when . . . something similar is present to the mind. To whatever extent the similarity holds, to that extent the past state is already re-enacted: the pressure is removed from a part, and the remainder is then able to break out. (557)¹¹¹

According to this Victorian medical theory, any reminder of a terrible experience will propel one back into the train of thought it first engendered.

Dickens alludes to such theories of repetitive behaviours in his characterization of Manette. After one of Manette's relapses into a shoemaking trance, he uses his medical expertise to self-diagnose, using terminology similar to that used by Bain and Carpenter: "I believe . . . that there had been a strong and extraordinary revival of the train of thought and remembrance that was the first cause of the malady. Some intense associations of a most distressing nature were vividly recalled, I think" (245). Indeed, Manette's reversion to his prison habits happens immediately after he finds out that his new son-in-law Darnay is the son of his old persecutor Evrémonde. Recurring prison imagery represents the way such an automatic reversion to past mental states can trap characters in their own memories. During one of Manette's repetitive episodes, Mr. Lorry tries to convince him to go out for a walk. Manette is mentally imprisoned in the Bastille, however, and so he cannot imagine the possibility of leaving his house (239). The

¹¹¹ Although *Senses and the Intellect* was first published in 1855, Bain only added this passage to the 1864 edition, after *A Tale of Two Cities* was written. Nonetheless, the 1855 edition provides an in depth examination of the Associationist law of similarity that Bain argues governs mental activity and that is responsible for repetitive and habitual thoughts. The text I quote above was added as a footnote to this section to clarify the physiological basis of the Associationist tenets Bain had laid out in 1855. The note is appended to the brief section on "Historical Memory," which is included in both the 1855 and 1864 editions, and which explains that historical narrative and history itself are shaped by habitual repetition.

prison cell is not only the originary cause of his repetitive episodes, but also a figure for the imprisoning quality of entrenched habits of mind.¹¹²

This subjugation to the force of habit robs characters of their conscious will and reduces them to a state of mechanism or animal instinct. Manette says that he “had seen common people struck more commonly than dogs” (396) and Madame Defarge’s brother complains that “it is among the Rights of these Nobles to harness us common dogs to carts, and drive us” (402). These comparisons to animals clearly emphasize the powerlessness of the oppressed characters, but the novel also implies that their emotional reactions to their experiences are unavoidably animalistic or infantile.¹¹³ For instance, when the Marquis negligently kills a peasant child, his father “howl[s] . . . like a wild animal” (130). When Manette is deprived of his shoemaking tools, he gets “a sudden sense of terror, like that which . . . strikes to the heart of a lost child” (248). When he slips into one of his dissociative states, he loses his conscious will and is described as an object. He has a “mechanical air of submission” (236) and a “mechanically

¹¹² Dickens uses similar psychological metaphors to describe the imprisonment of habit in *Little Dorrit* (1855-7). After a long imprisonment in the Marshalsea for debt, William Dorrit remains locked in the habits of mind he developed to cope with prison life. Even once he is freed, he continues to be as absurdly obsessed with status as he had been, for compensatory reasons, while in prison. His daughter Amy thus feels a “faint misgiving . . . that . . . she could never see him as he used to be before the prison days . . . in what he had just now said to her, and in his whole bearing towards her, there was the well-known shadow of the Marshalsea wall. . . . no space in the life of man could overcome that quarter of a century behind the prison bars” (398). Later, Mr. Dorrit has a fit in which he travels back in time mentally: he reverts back to his prison self and mistakes an elegant party for a gathering of his fellow prisoners. In both novels, cognitive habits imprison characters in repetitive mental states.

¹¹³ Wilkie Collins uses a similar pattern of animal imagery in *The Woman in White* as his shocked characters lose their conscious will and are reduced to a state of animal instinct. During the fire in the vestry, Walter observes of Percival’s shocked servant: “Terror seemed to have struck him with downright idiocy—he waited at my heels, he followed me about when I moved, like a dog” (527). Similarly, Fosco claims that “if [Anne] had scented danger in the air, as a dog scents the presence of some creature unseen, her alarm could not have displayed itself more suddenly” (624).

submissive manner” (237), and Lucie and the narrator both refer to him as “it” when he is in such a state (44, 427). Similarly, although Madame Defarge is a powerful and domineering character, when her husband asks her to consider stopping her vengeful acts, she replies that she has less conscious ability to direct her actions than the wind and fire do: “tell the Wind and Fire where to stop; not me” (421).

This depiction of characters succumbing to animalistic and automatic behaviour emerges from contemporary neurological ideas about instinctive processes. Peter Melville Logan has noted the importance of Marshall Hall’s 1837 *Memoirs of the Nervous System* in transforming Victorians’ views of the nervous body by emphasizing the instinctive and animalistic quality of certain bodily functions. According to Logan, “Hall argues for the presence of two distinct nervous systems in the body, centered separately in the brain and the spine” (167). Logan goes on to explain that, “By constructing a body with two separate nervous systems, [Hall] creates a body with two distinct stories, one of voluntary action operating through the brain, and a second of the species’ distant past, operating independently through the spinal system” (168). Hall’s research was primarily physiological and did not deal with psychological issues, but the distinction he drew between volitional and automatic behaviours, combined with Associationist doctrine, became part of the well-known Victorian psychological understanding of habit upon which Dickens draws. For instance, Carpenter explains that in succumbing to the repetitions of habit, one suspends the will and becomes in the process like an animal or “idiot:”

[W]hatever mode of activity has been once strongly impressed on

the organ, this has a tendency to perpetuate itself. In so far as the Will yields to this tendency, instead of controlling it, the individual becomes the slave of routine; and this condition is often very remarkably presented by persons who are deficient in Volitional power (as it is also among the lower animals). (630)

Hall's physiological research was an important precursor to Herbert Page's much later work on psychic shock in the 1880s, which I argue Dickens anticipates in *A Tale of Two Cities*. According to Ralph Harrington, "The model of the nervous system accepted by . . . Page was based on a hierarchy of nervous function, in which the highly developed cerebral functions of the human mind kept the animal functions of the body in due subjection" (53). In *Injuries of the Spine and Spinal Cord Without Apparent Mechanical Lesion* (1883), Page notes the tenuousness of this hierarchy and argues that psychic shock can lessen the control of the mind over the animal functions: "Let some sudden profound psychical disturbance arise . . . the intellectual control at once is lessened and the organic sensations declare their being, and force themselves into the conscious life of the individual;" henceforth, hysteria ensues (176). In a similar way, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, extraordinarily shocking or painful experiences suspend the brain's voluntary action, leaving only a primal nervous self that turns compulsively to repetitive, dissociated or hysterical behaviours that do not require conscious mediation.

The aristocratic characters therefore attempt to contain and isolate the animalistic suffering of the people they abuse, locking their victims up like dogs in a kennel. When Evrémonde calls Manette in to attend the young peasant

woman he has raped, she is bound and gagged in an upper chamber, with heavy draperies over the door to block the sound of her cries. Similarly, her brother is kept in “a back room across a second staircase, which was a species of loft over a stable” (399). His suffering is locked away with the animals, symbols of physicality and lack of conscious will. Because Manette witnesses this event and threatens to speak about it, he too is locked up in solitary confinement in the Bastille. The upper class does not see these characters as self-regulating subjects, each with their own mental control over their suffering selves. Instead, the aristocrats treat themselves as the governing mind, responsible for containing and controlling the animalistic body of the lower class.

iii. Communal Suffering, Individual Trauma: Class and the Psycho-Historical Process

These aristocratic attempts at containment are doomed to failure, however. The lower class characters in the novel constantly communicate their suffering to one another in ways that exceed the control of the upper classes and that also defy middle-class definitions of private identity. While this middle-class notion of discrete individual identity is in many ways the reigning ideology of the novel, Dickens’s comparison of it to the working-class affect structure subjects both models to scrutiny. Perhaps the most important metaphor for the working-class characters’ shared pain is that of the poisoned well. Before the revolution, Evrémonde carelessly kills a peasant’s young child; the peasant in turn murders the marquis, and is then caught, executed, and left hanging over the town well, poisoning it for good. This story spreads across France through the testimony, or

the “contagion of whispering” of the locals, and in particular of the mender of roads that Monsieur Defarge calls as a “witness” in his wine shop (281, 201). Defarge facilitates a similar process of witnessing and testimony by bringing several men to see the damaged Manette after he has been released from prison. Through the process of recounting stories of victimization, Defarge and his compatriots poison class relations, as the pain of one becomes the pain of all.

This shared suffering engenders a communal identity and sense of purpose that contrast sharply with the middle-class Manette’s alienating trauma. The suffering of the French mob is profound and horrific, but it differs from trauma, as I defined it in my introductory chapter. Their suffering does not challenge their identities or worldview, and is not resistant to language and representation.¹¹⁴ Except when maintaining a strategic secrecy, the working classes have no difficulty talking about their abuse. Though Madame Defarge’s sister is rendered mad by her experiences, her brother shares her pain and can tell her story to Manette, thus making the sister’s hysterical language decipherable. Such stories are common, fit into shared frames of reference, and contribute to a strong sense of communal purpose. Manette remarks of this young man that “Nothing human could have held life in the boy but his determination to tell all his wrong” (402). Stories of pain and oppression bind the French commoners together, so much so

¹¹⁴ Contemporary trauma theorists frequently define trauma by its resistance to representation. Shoshana Felman argues that “language [is] somehow incommensurate” with traumatic experience and Dori Laub notes that many trauma survivors “on some level prefer silence To not return from this silence is rule rather than exception” (Felman and Laub 50, 58). Caruth ascribes this silence to “the inaccessibility of trauma . . . its resistance to full theoretical analysis and understanding” (*Trauma* 10). “Trauma,” she explains, “does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned” (*Trauma* 151). These trauma theorists assume the universality of this difficulty with representation but I argue that it instead emerges from the post-Enlightenment problematization of suffering, and from the way such suffering challenges individuated modern bourgeois identity.

that the revolutionaries all begin to refer to one another by the name Jacques, to indicate their solidarity in suffering and eventually in the revenge they enact by becoming themselves oppressors in return. Because of the ability to suffer communally, their compulsive and repetitive re-enactment of the horrors they experience is not locked up inside (or at least not for long) and is instead turned outward, externalized as revenge.

Similarly, while in prison, the middle-class Dr. Manette wants to share his pain with others. He imagines two possible daughters. One is “perfectly forgetful,” blissfully unaware of his situation, while the other remembers her father’s victimization and tells his story to her children: “Her life was active, cheerful, useful; but my poor history pervaded it all” (229, 230). The first vision brings him great pain, while the second leaves him “blessed with the relief of tears” (230). Although the idea of his daughter’s suffering makes Manette cry, he is weeping out of relief at the thought that his suffering will be remembered and narrated, shared and understood by those closest to him.

Despite the desire to have his story be known and remembered, the novel demonstrates how difficult such expression is for a middle-class man like Manette. His isolated suffering in solitary confinement, and then his inability to share his story with others, highlight the unique character of the psychic suffering of the independent bourgeois subject. Manette is imprisoned by the social structures that keep his middle-class self enthralled to aristocratic power, but also by the solitariness of bourgeois individualism, an affect structure that is, once again, rendered in claustrophobic spatial terms. Victorians expected the middle-class man to be strong and self-sufficient, and for his life to follow a

developmental trajectory of forging an independent identity by overcoming obstacles, achieving professional success, and creating a life and home for his family.¹¹⁵ This path required manly integrity, self-discipline, willpower, and industrious energy, contained and channeled into appropriate work. This set of expectations, and the generic life story outlined for the bourgeois male subject (in part by the novelistic genre itself),¹¹⁶ is incompatible with the psychologically crushing suffering Dr. Manette experiences, and with the animalistic loss of conscious willpower this suffering causes.

The Victorian doctor J.E. Erichsen, who like Page investigated cases of psychic shock in the decades after *A Tale of Two Cities* was written, disagreed vehemently with Page's assertion that a purely mental shock could lead to psychic disintegration, particularly in the case of strong middle-class men. He claimed instead that the mysterious symptoms manifested by railway accident victims could be traced to the physical jarring of the crash. Harrington points out the ideological basis of Erichsen's dissent: "to suggest that an active, unemotional businessman was vulnerable to hysteria and could be reduced to the condition of an animal through a breakdown of mental control, was to undermine not merely a

¹¹⁵ For more on the Victorian construction of masculinity, see James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity*; Martin A. Danahay, *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art, and Masculinity*; Andrew Dowling, *Manliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature*; Joseph A. Kestner, *Masculinities in Victorian Painting*; Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art*; and John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*.

¹¹⁶ Many mid-Victorian novelists worked to redefine masculine values, emphasizing the middle-class *ethos* of integrity, energetic hard work, and self-discipline, rather than birth, education, or manners. See, for instance, the debates about how to define a "gentleman" in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Dinah Mulock Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856). Both these novels chart the trajectory of the self-made man who moves beyond his humble origins to achieve professional success through energy, courage, and self-discipline.

medical, but a moral model of what it meant to be a civilized human being” (53). Manette’s experiences are therefore traumatic, as we now understand the word, because they do not fit into the language and narratives that he has available to him. He must keep his suffering secret or risk the destruction of his middle-class, male identity. This is not to say that the Victorian novel or Victorian medicine were inadequate to represent the non-textual and universal reality of trauma; rather, the Victorian novel and Victorian medicine co-created a set of expectations for how life should progress, and these expectations engendered the experience of trauma. As I argue in my introductory chapter, to the extent that the novel and medical discourse both create bourgeois identity through the marginalization of suffering, they also create the nineteenth-century experience of trauma, of unexpected and inexpressible suffering that in turn threatens this very identity.

Manette’s trauma is so incompatible with bourgeois identity that he cannot talk about it with others and therefore continues to be locked up in a form of solitary confinement. Initially, no one in Manette’s family or circle of friends suffers in the same way, and his experience is unexpected and incomprehensible to them. The one time Manette does speak with Lucie about his prison experiences, his language takes on a bizarre quality. His evocation of two imaginary daughters is dream-like and his description of his fixation on watching the moon from his prison window is strangely repetitive: “I have looked at her from my prison-window . . . I have looked at her when it has been such torture to me . . . I have looked at her, in a state so dull and lethargic . . . I have looked at her, speculating thousands of times upon the unborn child from whom I had been rent” (228). Her father’s speech gives Lucie a “strange thrill” (228) and makes

“her blood [run] cold” (230). Despite her desire to sympathize with her father, his experiences are so foreign to the life she has led as to make them incomprehensible. He expresses doubt as to her ability to understand him: “Can you follow me, Lucie? Hardly, I think?” (230). In this scene, Manette seems never to have been released from the prison that separated him from his daughter.

Darnay’s parallel anecdote of a man who buries a letter in the old dungeon in which he is imprisoned echoes this difficulty of properly reading, understanding, and sharing the narrative of trauma. When this prisoner’s letter has been unearthed, all that remains are “the ashes of a paper, mingled with the ashes of a small leathern case or bag. What the unknown prisoner had written will never be read, but he had written something, and hidden it away to keep it from the gaoler” (119). Albert D. Hutter maintains that “The action of the novel is designed to deny this vision, to reaffirm continually not only the possibility of digging up a corpse but also of reviving it, of always making sense of the inchoate mumblings of the doctor--or, for that matter, even of the young peasant brother and sister who first lead the doctor into danger” (“Novelist” 24). Yet the Manette family’s domestic servant and trusted friend Miss Pross believes Manette may remember much more than he is able to express to his family. Although Manette “never refer[s] to the shoemaking time,” Miss Pross admits “I don’t say he don’t refer to it within himself” (114). Manette simply may not be able to communicate these terrible memories to others.

During one of Manette’s relapses, Mr. Lorry’s first instinct is to keep Manette’s suffering secret from everyone: “Two things at once impressed themselves on Mr. Lorry, as important above all others; the first, that this must be

kept secret from Lucie; the second that it must be kept secret from all who knew him” (238). The reason for keeping the secret from Lucie—to allow her to enjoy her honeymoon and her new life with her husband free from any guilt or worry—are fairly clear. But his desire to keep everyone else ignorant of the doctor’s relapse also reveals the shame attached to mental suffering, the way it threatens Manette’s hard-won professional and personal reputation. By implication, Manette’s trauma must remain shrouded in secrecy to protect his identity and his sanity. Although Mr. Lorry wonders “whether it is good for Doctor Manette to have that suppression always shut up within him” (Dickens 115), Miss Pross echoes Associationist doctrine when she insists that it “can’t be helped Touch that string, and he instantly changes for the worse” (115). His trauma must remain secret in part because of its incompatibility with bourgeois identity and in part because repeating the story of his suffering aloud would resurrect the former mental state, bringing his suffering back to life. After one of his relapses, Manette agrees with Mr. Lorry’s claim that he would “be sensibly relieved if he could prevail upon himself to impart that secret brooding to any one, when it is on him,” but says that, nonetheless, it is “next to impossible . . . quite impossible” (245). Any reminder of his past threatens to propel him back into his instinctive, habitual repetitions. Telling the story of his imprisonment and suffering would mean succumbing to the past, giving it an even stronger hold over him, and destroying the will-power and independence that define the middle-class man.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ In contrast, in *Little Dorrit*, William Dorrit’s refusal to discuss his time in prison intensifies the hold it has over him. *A Tale of Two Cities* may indeed suggest the same essential idea, however, since Manette’s psyche and his family’s safety are both eventually threatened by this secrecy.

The psychological danger and difficulty of talking about his painful experience is further demonstrated in Dr. Manette's prison letter, in which he relates the cause of his imprisonment and his emotional experiences there. Unlike the disintegrated letter in Darnay's anecdote about a similar prisoner, Manette's letter can be literally deciphered by those who find it. But his inability to express the traumatic core of his experience, while also maintaining his middle-class identity, makes his writing illegible in a more important way. In the letter, he repeatedly insists that his "memory is still accurate" (408), but the narrative is fragmented, punctuated with gaps, compromised. He admits, "I am weary, weary, weary—worn down by misery. I cannot read what I have written with this gaunt hand" (407). He claims that he is "growing more and more unequal to the task," that he "cannot write the words of [their] conversation" (408), and that "[t]hese scraps of paper fail [him]" (409). Although he lays some of the blame for this inability to write on the "cold," his "benumbed" "senses" and his suspicion that he is being "watched" (408), it is also clear that his emotional state is disintegrating as he writes, perhaps because of his writing. Indeed, when he thinks about his suffering, he begins to go mad. This decline is made clear when, at the end of the letter, he denounces the "pretty boy," the child of the "good, compassionate lady" (409) that he has just written about with such tenderness and understanding. The process of writing his story transforms his emotional state into something like that of the French working classes, who compulsively and violently repeat their oppression through revenge. I argue that Manette is caught between two forms of imprisonment: either he can remember the past and be imprisoned by its re-enactment, or he can shut his memories up inside him, keeping a part of himself

isolated from others in a form of psychological solitary confinement.

He initially takes the latter path, keeping his memories a secret and his instinctive, suffering locked up. After Darnay is condemned to death, Manette is able to hold his shock and horror temporarily in check, while his daughter Lucie reacts hysterically to the news. Mr. Lorry instructs her thus:

Lucie, my child, if ever you were brave and serviceable in your life—and you were always both—you will compose yourself now, to do exactly as I bid you; for more depends upon it than you can think or I can say. There is no help for you in any action on your part to-night; you cannot possibly stir out. I say this, because what I must bid you to do for Charles's sake, is the hardest thing to do of all. You must instantly be obedient, still, and quiet. You must let me put you in a room at the back here. You must leave your father and me alone for two minutes, and as there are Life and Death in the world you must not delay. (320)

She promises to “be submissive” and, in turn, “the old man kisse[s] her, and hurrie[s] her into his room, and *turn[s] the key*” (320, emphasis mine). This scene recalls the repetitive domestic containment of women in *A Simple Story*. Inchbald delineates the reliance of the patriarchal *homo clausus* on the containment of women, and of the suffering and vulnerability they represent. In this parallel scene, Manette and Mr. Lorry assign emotional weakness to the weak feminine character, who serves the family by allowing herself to be locked up. Once Lucie is contained, Mr. Lorry “open[s] the window and partly open[s] the blind” (320) to survey the social scene. Masculine reason and will are able to act only once

their weakness has been properly restrained, when men are in no danger of becoming like the women, children, or animals they contain and protect. In the very next line, and in the following chapters, Manette begins to be referred to as “the Doctor,” as though his merely personal self has been locked away with Lucie, and his professional masculine role is all that remains. Like the Evrémonde brothers, who lock up Manette to protect their aristocratic power and to contain the secret of the horrors they have perpetrated, Manette locks up Lucie, and the suffering part of himself that she represents, to avoid having his masculine reason overthrown by his weak suffering psyche. Nonetheless, he fails in this endeavour, falling once more into a compulsive and dissociated mental state when his efforts to save Darnay fail. This ironization of Manette’s gendering of suffering and his attempt to lock a part of himself up reveals the inadequacy of masculine bourgeois self-containment as a response to intense pain.

Interestingly, the novel suggests that the tortured and isolating interiority Manette retreats into is produced not only by the obviously abusive political practices of the *ancien régime*, but also by the soul-destroying habits of mind that English commercial institutions drill into their middle-class workers. The Bastille is a double for Tellson’s bank, another fortress-like building that locks up and protects the secrets of the wealthy and powerful. While Tellson’s does not have any actual prisoners locked away in its vaults or behind its “iron bars” (60, 171), its employees are mental prisoners who work as mechanically at their tasks as Dr. Manette does at his prison shoemaking: “Cramped in all kinds of dim cupboards and hutches at Tellson’s, the oldest of men carried on the business gravely. When they took a young man into Tellson’s London house, they hid him somewhere till

he was old” (61). Just like Dr. Manette, Mr. Lorry and the other Tellson’s clerks are imprisoned in repetitive mental habits imposed by powerful institutions. As Manette occasionally slips into dissociated shoemaking fugues that threaten to alienate him from his loved ones, so too does Mr. Lorry experience “several relapses into business-absorption” (108), which threaten his budding friendship with Manette and Lucie.¹¹⁸

Such prisons lock people up in time as well as space. Manette tries to keep a calendar to mark time while in jail, but eventually gives up the effort. Even after he leaves prison, he continues to be locked up mentally in the space/time of his imprisonment; his mental habits keep him confined to a perpetual, unchanging moment and to the repetitive task of shoemaking. The spatial metaphor of the prison thereby represents the temporal experience of habit. In contrast, Mr. Lorry lives in the “business time” signified by the perpetual ticking of his watch, but instead of marking the linear passage of time into the future, the watch “pitted its gravity and longevity against the levity and evanescence of the brisk fire” (19). The incessant ticking signifies the continuity and repetition that “[drill]” Mr. Lorry’s face into “the composed and reserved expression of Tellson’s bank” (20).

Contending against the spatio-temporal prisons of the Bastille and Tellson’s, and against Manette’s self-imposed and metaphorical solitary

¹¹⁸ Cates Baldridge calls Mr. Lorry’s absorption by Tellson’s “innocuous” and claims “no one can dispute the fact that his subsumption of self into the collective enterprise of the Bank endows his life both with a beneficent purposefulness and (for all his talk of heartlessness) an unproblematic sociality” (641, 642). Yet Lorry has to learn sociability from Lucie. Though his work with the Bank does give him a sense of purpose, it pales in comparison to that which he gains from trying to keep Lucie, Darnay, and Manette safe. In fact, his loyalty to Tellson’s conflicts with his ability to care for Lucie when he decides it would not be right to harbour her in Tellson’s property in France (324).

confinement, is the perhaps greater evil of the undifferentiated lower classes, the “human stew” (92) glimpsed at Darnay’s English trial: “All the human breath in the place, rolled at him, like a sea, or a wind, or a fire . . . Jerry stood: aiming at the prisoner the beery breath of a whet he had taken as he came along, and discharging it to mingle with the waves of other beer, and gin, and tea, and coffee, and what not, that flowed at him” (71). This contagion and penetrability mirror the French mass revolutionary violence that obliterates all individual concerns: “What private solicitude could rear itself against the deluge of the Year One of Liberty” (335)?¹¹⁹ A binary thus emerges between the extremes of imprisoned middle-class solitude and the undifferentiated and vengeful lower-class masses. But the novel repeatedly undermines and complicates this binary. The imprisoned Manette loses his name and volitional powers while in the Bastille, and he becomes no different from any other damaged French prisoner. The business-minded Mr. Lorry also loses his ability to think or act privately when caught up in the business of Tellson’s bank. There is a lack of differentiation in their solitude that parallels that of the English and French mobs.

Not all forms of openness and inter-subjectivity are presented negatively in the novel. Compassion and empathy are contagious as well as hatred. At

¹¹⁹ Other critics have pointed out that Dickens aligns France and the French revolution with anti-individualism. Daniel Stout traces the links between the revolutionary and aristocratic “indifference to individual distinction” (29). Hanbery MacKay examines the way the novel portrays revolutionary violence as breaking through psychic isolation: “Dickens . . . employs symbolism to describe the taking of the Bastille: heads, facades, mazes, the prison itself all point to isolation, while the surrounding ocean of the people of St. Antoine becomes an image of violent transcendence” (199). Baldridge also argues that “Dickens’s deep dissatisfaction with the social relations fostered by his own acquisitive and aggressively individualist society leads him at times to explore with sensitivity and even enthusiasm the liberating possibilities offered by an ideology centered elsewhere than upon the autonomous self. . . . what emerges is a subversive subtext to the narrator’s middle-class horror at the collectivist Revolutionary ideology promulgated behind the barricades of Paris” (634).

Darnay's English trial, his situation has a powerful effect on Lucie, who communicates her feelings to the crowd without being swept up in its quickly changing passions. Her open countenance is "strikingly expressive of an engrossing terror and compassion that saw nothing but the peril of the accused. This had been so very noticeable, so very powerfully and naturally shown, that starers who had had no pity for him were touched by her" (74). Darnay has a similarly frank and expressive face: "As an emotion of the mind will express itself through any covering of the body, so the paleness which his situation engendered came through the brown upon his cheek, showing the soul to be stronger than the sun" (71) Yet Darnay is "otherwise quite self-possessed" (71). Darnay's and Lucie's healthy ability to communicate their inner states to an outside world while maintaining the boundaries of their own identities is the ideal towards which the novel strives. It is the alternative to the hived off, traumatized version of bourgeois individualism represented by Manette and Lorry, and to the erasure of individual identity in mass revolutionary violence represented by the French mob.

This ideal balance between openness and self-containment is embodied in the home that replaces the prison and bank for Manette and Lorry. The Soho house is a perfect medium between the seclusion of the prison and the tumult of the city, and between the sealed off and gaping subjectivities each represents. It offers both openness to and protection from the outside world:

A quainter corner than the corner where the Doctor lived, was not to be found in London. There was no way through it, and the front windows of the Doctor's lodgings commanded a pleasant little vista of street country airs circulated in Soho with vigorous freedom

The summer light struck into the corner brilliantly in the earlier part of the day; but, when the streets grew hot, the corner was in shadow, though not in shadow so remote but that you could see beyond it into a glare of brightness. It was a cool spot, staid but cheerful, a wonderful place for echoes, and a very harbour from the raging streets (109).

The home allows for and symbolizes the interdependent individuality the novel idealizes. This feminized domestic space accommodates the masculine bourgeois psyche that must deny trauma to be appropriately masculine, but it nonetheless also affords a controlled emotional openness. Even though Dr. Manette and Lucie have each their own individual rooms, “the doors by which they communicated [were] put open that the air might pass freely through them all” (111). At this point, Dickens seems to be writing revolutionary history as feminized domestic novel; Victorian middle-class domesticity provides a temporary solution to political injustice.¹²⁰

The temporal movements of the home also replace the miserable stasis and repetition of the prison and bank. The domestic plot lends the story a forward momentum that had been blocked by psychological and historical repetition. Lucie is “the golden thread that united [her father] to a Past beyond his misery, and to a Present beyond his misery” (93). The home contains its own repetitions, such as Lucie’s domestic rituals, the companionate pacing that replaces Manette’s

¹²⁰ For more on the way nineteenth-century novels resolve political tensions through feminized domestic plots and settings, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*.

shoemaking, and the cycle of generation that produces children named after the previous generation. John B. Lamb has argued that “the domestic realm in Dickens’ novel is an atemporal space, a timeless utopia where Lucie follows Lucie in endless succession and where time is ordered, regulated, and finally erased in an endless series of occupations” (234). Yet these repetitions do not suspend time; rather, they connect times and people together through the process of change. Lucie establishes a spiraling time to balance continuity and transformation.

Yet the bourgeois domestic space can provide only temporary sanctuary for Manette’s psychological woes. Though the domestic sphere does represent the attempt to establish a balance between individuality and interdependence and between continuity and change, it is nonetheless a signal failure.¹²¹ The novel highlights the inadequacy of bourgeois domesticity by dramatizing the way the happy functioning of the domestic sphere requires the suppression of the details of Manette’s imprisonment and of Darnay’s political history. Darnay leaves his affairs in France in disarray because of his desire not to remind Manette of the past: “How much of the incompleteness of his situation was referable to [Manette], through the painful anxiety to avoid reviving old associations of France in his mind, [Darnay] did not discuss with himself” (298). In this novel, keeping these matters secret does not make them go away; instead, it gives them

¹²¹ Although Lamb sees the novel’s domestic sphere as an alternative to and cure for the unregulated and pathologized brutality of history, he admits that Dickens does “[draw] a disturbing parallel between the State bonds that the brothers Evrémonde use to imprison Defarge’s sister and the domestic bonds or ‘golden threads’ that Lucie employs to save Carton and her husband” (240-1). He assumes, however, that any reservations the novel might express about the domestic plot must necessarily be “unconscious” (241). I argue, in contrast, that the novel draws explicit attention to the failures of the domestic realm.

more power once they are revealed. The domestic plot that promises to bring happiness to Manette, Darnay, Lorry, and Lucie instead suppresses and eventually intensifies the reality of violence.

The details of Manette's imprisonment are revealed in dramatic analeptic fashion when his prison letter denouncing his oppressors and their heirs is read aloud in a French courtroom. This letter leads to the condemnation of Darnay, who is his oppressor's heir, the "pretty boy" he condemned while in prison (409). Manette's writing figuratively resurrects his past self, telling the story he has been unable and unwilling to tell, of the abuses he witnessed and of his own victimization. The truth of Manette's denunciation of Darnay is divorced completely from the larger narrative of his life, a divorce that was mandated by bourgeois masculinity as well as the feminized domestic sphere. The denunciation is therefore severed from the context that would explain it as a cry of pain and not a curse. Manette's writing therefore condemns his own son-in-law to death, realizing in a horrible manner Manette's vision of his "poor history . . . pervad[ing]" his daughter's entire life.¹²² His story is swept up into the larger narrative of the revolution, and his personal stake in his son-in-law's fate becomes meaningless. As soon as Manette's secrets are aired, they become part of the communal process of externalizing the repetition of violence through revenge. Like Manette, Darnay is imprisoned in France and separated from his wife and baby daughter, who is also named Lucie. When in prison, Darnay behaves like

¹²² In a similar manner, Madame Defarge's brother's desire to tell his horrible story keeps him alive for a time, but the "poor history" of his family's torture pervades his sister's entire life in destructive and ultimately fatal ways.

Manette, pacing, thinking repetitive thoughts, and compulsively repeating the phrase “he made shoes, he made shoes, he made shoes” (315). Despite Manette’s desire to contain his suffering inside himself to protect his middle-class identity and family, he is unable to keep his suffering self from imprisoning those around him.

iv. The Dangers of History: The Indian Uprising and the Schooling of the Emotions

In delineating the way Manette’s story about his unjust imprisonment and suffering compels Darnay to repeat this experience, *A Tale of Two Cities* implies that the narration of traumatic personal history is potentially dehumanizing and leads to repetitive reenactments of violence, even when violence is what the stories are intended to combat. The repetition of horrifying stories can trap the teller or listener in the emotional pattern such stories invoke. Since characters in the novel are damaged by hearing about the horrors of the *ancien régime*, there are clear implications for historians in the tradition of Carlyle or Macaulay and for novelists like Dickens, all of whom wrote about the past in such vivid detail that their readers felt it come alive. In a review of Carlyle’s *French Revolution*, Mill points out that Carlyle’s historiographic mode is aimed at a reader left cold by more detached histories: “the lives and deeds of his fellow-creatures must be placed before him in quite another manner, if he is to know them, or feel them to be real beings, who once were alive, beings of his own flesh and blood, not mere shadows and dim abstractions” (18). Similarly, in an 1828 review of Henry Hallam’s *Constitutional History*, Macaulay laments that the historical novel has

appropriated history's proper role, which is

To make the past present, to bring the distant near, to place us in the society of a great man on an eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle, to invest with the reality of human flesh and blood beings whom we are too much inclined to consider as personified qualities in an allegory, to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities (310).¹²³

Mill and Macaulay focus on the allure of this historical past, but Dickens demonstrates the horrific consequences of resurrecting the dread figures and bloody deeds of history. The novel reinforces this horror by associating the act of dredging up the past with Jerry, the brutal grave-robber or "Resurrection-man" (196). Although this resurrection motif is often positive, as when Dr. Manette is "recalled to life" (10), it also functions as a perversion of rebirth and Christian resurrection. Digging up the corpses of the past can prompt further death instead of new life. Hutter claims that the novel reflects "the author's need to know, to resurrect the corpse into a living narrative, a history, while it suggests at the same time the unspeakable fear aroused by such an act, by any direct confrontation with the dead, with the encrypted past" ("Novelist" 19). If historical writing can resurrect and reenact the horrors it relates, and if telling the stories of abuse poisons the communal well, then the historian and historical novelist must both be very cautious. The obvious temptation would be not to tell (hi)stories at all, but to

¹²³ See Mark Salber Philips, "Macaulay, Scott, and the Literary Challenge to Historiography" and *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* for discussions of Macaulay's and Carlyle's expressive and "proximative" historiographic mode, and for its connection to Romanticism and the rise of the novel.

suffer in silence and allow the past to remain buried. Yet *A Tale of Two Cities* also emphasizes the danger involved in trying to suppress painful history. Manette's story gains destructive power because it has been kept secret for decades. Because of the parallel dangers of speaking and of remaining silent, the novel considers how to unlock an imprisoned psyche without in turn causing the traumatic psychological imprisonment of others. In the context of the Associationist theory that negative emotions can be imprinted indelibly on the mind, the historian, or the historical novelist, takes on the responsibility of presenting and making sense of history in a way that does not breed further repetition.

Perhaps the need for a model for responsible history writing was, for Dickens, prompted less by the fairly distant French Revolution than by contemporary Victorian political events, such as the Indian Uprising of 1857, which Christopher Herbert argues was an important influence on *A Tale of Two Cities*. In *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma*, Herbert outlines the "passionately polarized" British response to the rebellion (210). In the immediate aftermath of the event, the desire to empathize with the plight of Indians was countered by racist, nationalist, and vengeful calls for retribution, provoked by sensationalized accounts of Indian atrocities committed against British women and children. Herbert details the suspense and anguish British people experienced while waiting for news of loved ones abroad, and argues that the six weeks it took to receive news from India must "have greatly stimulated the proliferation of fantasy and rumour that formed a principal characteristic of this war" (22). William Oddie points out that the "general hysteria had been whipped up, not only by authentic accounts of what actually happened, but by highly

coloured inventions, many contained in letters home and published eagerly by the press, of all kinds of loathsome and barbaric incidents” (“Dickens and the Indian”

4). Indeed, the lack of reliable political coverage of this event created mass hysteria.

In an 1857 letter, Macaulay details his reaction to the situation in India, which he learned about by reading letters printed in the newspaper:

No more news . . . but private letters are appearing daily in the newspapers. The cruelties of the Sepoys have inflamed the nation to a degree unprecedented within my memory. Peace Societies, and Aborigines Protection Societies, and Societies for the Reformation of Criminals are silenced. There is one terrible cry for revenge. The account of that dreadful military execution at Peshawur,— forty men blown at once from the mouths of cannon, their heads, legs, arms flying in all directions,—was read with delight by people who three weeks ago were against all capital punishment. . . . The almost universal feeling is that not a single Sepoy within the walls of Delhi should be spared; and I own that it is a feeling with which I cannot help sympathizing. (qtd. in Trevelyan 444)

Dickens himself reacted with vitriol to the Mutiny, or at least to the often fictional depictions of it in the press. In an 1857 letter to Angela Burdett-Coutts, he fantasizes about genocide: “I wish I were Commander-in-Chief in India. The first thing I would do to strike that Oriental race with amazement . . . should be to proclaim to them . . . that I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested . . . to blot it out of mankind and raze it

off the face of the earth” (*Letters* 8: 459).¹²⁴

Despite this initial desire for vengeance, Herbert makes a convincing case that *A Tale of Two Cities* is an allegorical rethinking of the Indian Uprising, a belated and humanitarian attempt to understand the causes of revolutionary violence like that perpetrated in India, and a self-aware denunciation of the knee-jerk hatred of revolutionaries that Dickens himself had engaged in.¹²⁵ I argue that the novel also illuminates the dangers of the style of political narration that whipped Dickens into his xenophobic, murderous rage. Indeed, in his letter to Burdett-Coutts, Dickens attributes his “Demoniacal” emotional state to his reading “letters in the Times, day after day” about the situation in India (459). In an 1857 letter, Macaulay expresses concern about such demoniacal emotional states being stirred up by press accounts of the situation in India:

[It] is painful to be so revengeful as I feel myself. I, who cannot bear to see a beast or bird in pain, could look on without winking while Nana Sahib underwent all the tortures of Ravallac. And these feelings are not mine alone. Is it possible that a year passed under the influence of such feelings should not have some effect on

¹²⁴ Though this letter is certainly very disturbing, many critics exaggerate its violence by quoting it only in part. (See, for example, Herbert 212 and Joshi 49.) By removing the section about trying to strike the Indians with amazement by “proclaim[ing] to them” this threat, critics thus distort Dickens’ paternalistic fantasy about threatening violence into a fantasy about actually committing it. It is bad enough to fantasize about cowing a population into submission with threats of genocide, and Dickens describes the scene with enough relish to imply an attraction to this violence. It is, nonetheless, important that he does not say he would actually carry out this threat.

¹²⁵ For other critical interpretations of the connection between *A Tale of Two Cities* and the Indian Uprising, see Priti Joshi, “Mutiny Echoes: India, Britons, and Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*,” Grace Moore, *Dickens and Empire*; and Oddie, “Dickens and the Indian Mutiny.” Moore also argues that “by 1859 Dickens had calmed down significantly” in his attitude to India (128).

the national character? The effect will be partly good and partly bad. The nerves of our minds will be braced. . . . But shall we not hold human life generally cheaper than we have done? Having brought ourselves to exult in the misery of the guilty, shall we not feel less sympathy for the sufferings of the innocent? (qtd in Trevelyan 445-6)

According to Macaulay, then, this violent political writing toughens the nerves and steels the nation against compassion. In other words, it has the potential to erode the problematization of suffering, the reformist impulse to eliminate pain, and the discomfort with public execution and torture that I discussed in my introduction. As I noted earlier, Charles Taylor argues that the value given to ordinary human life defines the modern age. While Macaulay does not take a historical perspective in this letter, his claim implies that reading about brutal violence could return the British people to this earlier attitude to human suffering. It would eliminate trauma, as the “nerves of [their] minds would be braced,” but would lead to an exultation in misery and the glorification of revenge.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the narration of violence leads to this exultation in misery; it braces the nerves to unsympathetic brutality. We are given no evidence that the revolutionary leaders, Monsieur and Madame Defarge, have themselves been subjected to the violence and horrors of the *ancien régime*, but they have witnessed and heard about the suffering of others, and their capacity for sympathy is thereby deadened. When Lucie appeals to Madame Defarge as a “sister-woman” (329), Madame Defarge responds with a litany of the abuses she has witnessed and which negate any claim to fellow feeling:

The wives and mothers we have been used to see, since we were as little as this child, and much less, have not been greatly considered? We have known *their* husbands and fathers laid in prison and kept from them, often enough? All our lives, we have seen our sister-women suffer, in themselves and in their children, poverty, nakedness, hunger, thirst, sickness, misery, oppression and neglect of all kinds? . . . Is it likely that the trouble of one such wife and mother would be much to us now? (329)

By highlighting the destructive effects of witnessing and hearing about such violence, the novel implies that writing about violent history is a very dangerous endeavour.

In expressing this concern, Dickens departs from the classical historiographic model, which regards history reading as unreservedly positive as it has the

power to shape both the mind and the will to meet the tasks of public life. A central assumption of this humanist teaching was that a reader who is confronted with effective representations of the ideal will be moved by a spontaneous desire for emulation—or, in the case of vicious example, by an equivalent feeling of abhorrence. (Salber Phillips *Society* 126-7)

In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, this classical attitude to the schooling of the judgement was modified by a sentimental focus on the schooling of the emotions, the inspiration of “habits of benevolence” in readers of history (127). In his depiction of the execution of Mary Stuart, even the relatively sober

eighteenth-century historian David Hume demonstrates the way in which sympathy can elevate the soul:

She now began, with the aid of her two women, to disrobe herself; and the executioner also lent his hand to assist them. . . . Her servants, seeing her in this condition ready to lay her head upon the block, burst into tears and lamentations One of her maids, whom she had appointed for that purpose, covered her eyes with a handkerchief; she laid herself down without any sign of fear or trepidation; and her head was severed from her body at two strokes by the executioner. He instantly held it up to the spectators, streaming with blood, and agitated with the convulsions of death: the dean of Peterborow alone exclaimed, “So perish all queen Elizabeth's enemies!” The earl of Kent alone replied, “Amen!” The attention of all the other spectators was fixed on the melancholy scene before them; and zeal and flattery alike gave place to present pity and admiration of the expiring princess. (Hume *History* 68)

Hume details how this scene prompts immediate pity and admiration from almost everyone in the audience. This scene thus functions as an internal analog for the effect of historical representation on the reader. Following this interpretation, sympathetic readers would not be schooled in vengeance by such a scene, as they would reject immediately the anomalous reactions of the bloodthirsty dean of Peterborough and Earl of Kent, and instead experience the benevolent emotions of pity and admiration automatically inspired in the vast majority of onlookers to the scene itself. In contrast to Dickens's concerns about the degrading effect of

witnessing or hearing about violence, this eighteenth-century model instead implies that such experiences will improve the mind and heart.

In his commentary on this scene from Hume, the early nineteenth-century historian James Mackintosh stresses the salutary moral effect of both history and novel reading on the emotions. He disagrees with the eighteenth-century Associationist philosopher Dugald Stewart, who criticized novel reading for dulling the sensibility by repeating and thus desensitizing the reader to scenes of distress. Mackintosh instead claims that repetition strengthens associations between distress and pity, and so reading novels and history books enhances sensibility:

It should be observed, that, for the purpose of this argument, history and fiction are on a footing; both present distress not occurring in our own experience. . . . The effect of the death of Clarissa, or of Mary Stuart, on the heart, by no means depends on the fact that the one really died, but on the vivacity of the exhibition by the two great painters, Hume and Richardson. All the interest of the story, and all the charm of the style, produce subordinate sentiments, which, in pathetic narrative, flow into the main stream of pity, sweeten its composition, increase its pleasurable ingredients, and strengthen the disposition towards it. As benevolence, which is the most delightful of all human feelings, is a part of pity, the latter is never wholly painful; and the pain seldom predominates for a long time. (II: 136)

This belief in the beneficial effect of history reading persists into the mid-

nineteenth century in the writings, for instance, of Arnold and of historian James Anthony Froude.¹²⁶

Unlike Hume and Mackintosh, who argued that scenes of public execution would prompt spontaneous outpourings of benevolence, Dickens instead dramatizes the morally degrading effects of such scenes. Contrast Hume's description of Mary Stuart's execution with Darnay's trial in *A Tale of Two Cities*:

The sort of interest with which this man was stared and breathed at, was not a sort that elevated humanity. Had he stood in peril of a less horrible sentence—had there been a chance of any one of its savage details being spared—by just so much would he have lost his fascination. The form that was to be doomed to be so shamefully mangled, was the sight; the immortal creature that was to be so butchered and torn asunder, yielded the sensation. Whatever gloss the various spectators put upon the interest, according to their several arts and powers of self-deceit, the interest was, at the root of it, Ogreish. (Dickens 71-2)

Although Dickens usually idealizes the human capacity for benevolence, scenes like this one suggest that benevolence is not the automatic response to scenes of suffering. Unsurprisingly, then, Dickens called for the abolishment of public

¹²⁶ Arnold claims that his goal in writing history is to “encourage the love of all things noble and just, and wise and holy” (qtd. in Stanley 406). In an 1864 lecture on “The History of Science,” Froude argues that history should aspire to the emotional complexity of literature, since “The address of history is less to the understanding than the higher emotions. We learn in it to sympathise with what is great and good; we learn to hate what is base” (35).

executions in an 1849 letter to the Times.¹²⁷ Catherine Gallagher claims that in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens denounces public execution for its voyeurism and invasion of the private as a way of deflecting attention away from the novel's own Ogreish and invasive intrusion into the private suffering of its characters. For Gallagher, the novel emerges as the safe alternative to the theatrical public execution because it protects instead of destroying the private sphere (126). But perhaps Dickens is more wary of the novelistic depiction of violence than Gallagher suggests. As I argued earlier, *A Tale of Two Cities* presents the narration of horrifying events as psychologically dangerous, since it has the potential to promote the same kind of vicious behaviours it depicts. The reading of Manette's prison letter detailing his unjust imprisonment leads the French revolutionaries to inflict the very same unjust imprisonment on Darnay. In the novel, telling stories about violence and abuse perpetuates that same violence and abuse; *A Tale of Two Cities* thus engages in meta-narrative critique. Although the novel is certainly not anti-historical, it is cautious in its attitude to both historiography and novel writing, aware of the dangers of narration even as it demonstrates its fundamental importance.

¹²⁷ Dickens wrote the letter after witnessing the public execution of Mr. and Mrs. Manning, which he describes as follows:

A sight so inconceivably awful as the wickedness and levity of the immense crowd collected at that execution this morning could be imagined by no man When the two miserable creatures . . . were turned quivering into the air, there was no more emotion, no more pity, no more thought that two immortal souls had gone to judgement, no more restraint in any of the previous obscenities, than if the name of Christ had never been heard in this world, and there were no belief among men but that they perished like the beasts. (*Letters* 4: 220)

He therefore concludes "that nothing that ingenuity could devise to be done in this city, in the same compass of time, could work such ruin as one public execution" (221).

v. Responsible Historiography: Sacrifice, Typology and Dickens's Secular Scripture

What kind of narrative method could evade the replication of habitual violence? The problem with the story of Manette's trauma is that he could find no way to integrate his suffering in prison into the larger narrative of his life as happy middle-class father and useful doctor. The novel implies that the domestic sphere cannot fully heal the wounds of history because it too radically excludes them. Even when Manette tries to integrate his suffering into his familial narrative, to see it as the forge that has strengthened him enough to allow him to save his son-in-law (333), this narrative fails when his prison letter condemning Darnay resurrects his suffering self. In contrast, the stories shared by working-class characters are easily integrated into larger narratives, but these narratives are problematic in that they perpetuate cyclical violence.

The sacrifice that ends the novel offers the only way out of the pattern of repetition that structures the novel. In a Christ-like gesture, Sydney Carton, who is Darnay's virtual twin, takes Darnay's place at the guillotine, dying so that Darnay can live. These two characters' interchangeability mirrors the inter-subjectivity and lack of boundaries that typify the working-class characters. These loose boundaries violate bourgeois notions of individual character, but nonetheless allow Carton to share Darnay's suffering, and to save him for the sake of Lucie, whom Carton also loves. In his final moments, this sacrifice connects Carton more deeply to others than he has been at any point in the novel, but he nonetheless remains completely self-determining. He does not lose his free will. He therefore enacts a form of subjectivity that combines bourgeois self-

determination with working-class solidarity.

Carton's conscious decision to sacrifice himself for others is also significant. As I argued earlier, free will is the most important human characteristic the abused and oppressed characters lose when they succumb to repetition and become subject to mechanistic cognitive processes. Over and over again in the novel, suffering reduces characters to animalistic or mechanistic instinct; they repeat their actions because they have no conscious ability to resist this impulse. The historical process, as governed by Associationist tenets, is therefore essentially inhuman and uncontrollable.¹²⁸ Carton steps into the pattern of violent and uncontrollable repetition that dominates novel's vision of history, but he inscribes a new narrative of consciously chosen self-sacrifice palimpsestically onto the old narrative of suffering and revenge. Therefore, when successive generations of the Manette-Darnay family tell and retell the story of his death, it is not harmful for them; it does not poison the well. Darnay's children are named after Sydney, and follow along in his profession, thus resurrecting him on earth and carrying on the repetition so central to this novel's vision of the passage of time. But the negative historical cycle is replaced with a positive spiral at the end, wherein Carton's death leads not to further death, but like the death of Christ, allows for rebirth and resurrection.

Critics have frequently argued that this Christ-like sacrifice relocates the novel from the terrain of history to that of timeless myth. For instance, Gilbert

¹²⁸ In a similar vein, Froude inveighs against the idea of a predictable "Science of History" because of its negation of human agency and free will, qualities which he thought shone forth most clearly in moments of self-sacrifice (8, 16).

sees the end of the novel, and particularly its cyclical resurrection motif, as essentially ahistorical (259).¹²⁹ But the hope of resurrection held out by Carton's self-sacrifice is not necessarily cyclical in the way Gilbert suggests. As Northrop Frye has pointed out, the forward-moving and end-directed "typology of the Bible links it to history in a way impossible for paganism, which remains based on the recurring cycles of nature" (61). Gilbert sees cycles where there is really a spiral; time moves forward while integrating the recurrent patterns of the past. In adopting a spiral vision of the passage of time throughout history, Dickens structures history in a way that resembles Michelet's harmonization of cyclical recurrence with the idea of progress. Lamb emphasizes the importance of Carton's nickname, "Memory," in order to claim that his sacrifice "signals . . . the death of history, for when Carton goes to the guillotine, 'Memory' dies" (234). Yet, as I argue above, "Memory" does not die; his typological similarity to Christ implies that he can be resurrected. "Resurrection" was in fact Michelet's nickname for historiography.¹³⁰ By holding out hope of "Memory's" Christ-like

¹²⁹ Gilbert is certainly not alone in seeing the end of the novel as an escape from history. Soultana Maglavera has summarized this critical consensus:

The critics who see the novel as embodying a grim conception of history usually interpret the ending as a flight from historical experience, and as pointing to a liberation beyond time and history. . . . [John] McWilliams finds in Carton's Christlike death a personal sacrifice that is a sufficient recompense for the evils of history. Alexander Welsh in *The City of Dickens* has suggested that the ending arrests the development of narrative time as it stands. G. W. Kennedy argues that Dickens's endings point toward 'an escape from the wasting effects of ordinary time' into a 'mythical time.' Robert Alter, whose view of history is also a grim one, sees the novel as a depiction of the problem of historical dehumanization and as upholding the idea of history as the medium for the implementation of evil. (128-9)

¹³⁰ In *The People*, Michelet writes: "Be it my share in the future, not to have attained, but to have marked the end of history, to have named it by a name given by no one before me. Thierry called it *narration* and M. Guizot, *analysis*. I have named it *resurrection*, and it will retain the name" (25). Similarly, as Hutter points out, "The overt and seemingly relentless subtext of" *A Tale*

resurrection, *A Tale of Two Cities* thus implies that the right kind of storytelling can transform Memory positively into History.¹³¹ Historical novels like *A Tale of Two Cities* thereby have the potential to shape History by resisting the cyclical historical and psychological forces that would otherwise limit free will and turn humans into machines. In this, the novel's structure resembles the approach of contemporary British Liberal Anglican historians, many of whom accepted Vico's cyclical pattern of history, but who, Culler notes, were "troubled" about whether it "did not involve a fatalism, a pessimism, even a paganism that was sharply at variance with their liberal Christian philosophy" (86). Culler notes that Julius Hare, for example, conceived of "the whole course of civilization [as] a wayward one, moving generally forward but with many eddies and returns upon itself" (86). Dickens adopts this structure to harmonize the pessimism of a cyclical science of history with the positive possibilities of Christianity and of progressive history.

However, the novel introduces an equal amount of doubt about the finality of this generic pattern, and to its ability to provide final closure. The twentieth-century historian and trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra warns that in narrating and writing the history of trauma in an attempt to provide or find emotional closure, one risks slipping into "harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of

of Two Cities "is to give meaning to death or to the past, to disinter the historical moment and make it come alive, to recover bodies and letters and everything that may presumably have disappeared and to resurrect them, to give them meaning. Most often, death is made to enhance life" ("Novelist" 25).

¹³¹ Although he does not develop this argument, Gilbert does admit that "in the face of profound nineteenth-century disillusionment about the uses of the past," in the end, the novel "argues for a kind of history that is not a nightmare. In Dickens' celebratory conclusion to *A Tale of Two Cities*, Sydney Carton awakes both out of the history of his dead past and into the history of a living future" (264).

extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit (for example, unearned confidence about the ability of the human spirit to endure any adversity with dignity and nobility)” (41-2). This theorization reflects the post-Enlightenment understanding of suffering as a challenge to, rather than a confirmation of, the human character and cosmic order. Despite its typological ending, *A Tale of Two Cities* nonetheless operates within this post-Enlightenment context. Although the generic expectations of the comic Victorian novel demand the “harmonizing or spiritually uplifting” closure of the happy ending, the happy ending in *A Tale of Two Cities* is told only indirectly and with more hesitancy than is usually admitted by critics.¹³² When the narrator describes Lucie, Manette, Miss Pross, and Mr. Lorry’s escape from France, he slips into the present tense and into an indeterminate voice: “Houses in twos and threes pass by us, solitary farms, ruinous buildings The agony of our impatience is then so great, that in our wild alarm and hurry we are for getting out and running—hiding—doing anything but stopping” (Dickens 441).¹³³ This dramatic change in tense and voice jars the reader out of an easy acquiescence with the narrator’s ultimate authority

¹³² For instance, Murray Baumgarten writes that when “Sydney Carton mounts the scaffold, his final vision is an unwritten piece of autobiographical writing, voiced beyond any imprisoning code and opening into the prophetic realm where writing is absolute and true” (163).

¹³³ Dickens borrows this technique from Carlyle’s *The French Revolution*. Carlyle writes: “it is a most lying thing that same Past Tense always . . . For observe, always one most important element is surreptitiously withdrawn from the Past Time: the haggard element of Fear! Not there does Fear dwell, nor Uncertainty, nor Anxiety; but it dwells here; haunting us, tracking us. . . . making the Tense a mere Present one!” (98). H.M. Daleski notes that “It is a measure of Dickens’s recognition of the novelist in Carlyle that at perhaps the most anxious moment in *A Tale of Two Cities* -- and only in this instance -- he should employ a similar combination of tense and pronoun” (III: 63). Carlyle uses the present tense fairly frequently, and it serves to increase immediacy, pulling readers into the emotional key of the historical moment he describes. I argue that, because Dickens uses this technique so sparingly, it has a different effect. The technique does communicate the characters’ fear more effectively than the past tense would, but since it differs so radically from the tone of the rest of the text, it also dislodges the reader’s sense of the narrator’s stability and omniscience.

and his place outside the text and in the future. This change forces the reader to ask who the narrator is and whether or not he does have the authority or perspective to narrate the future of characters whose perspective and time frame he shares.

The narrator introduces another odd indeterminacy by relating the happy ending of the Manette-Darnay clan only indirectly, through Carton's unspoken prophetic vision. Carton predicts events that would already have happened in the future time frame of the discourse, the time frame the narrator usually inhabits. Yet the narrator gives the reader no confirmation that the events Carton dreams about actually come to pass. He may only be imagining this rosy future. Although the narrator claims that Carton's words "were prophetic" (464), he might not mean that they involve "the foretelling of future events," but instead might be suggesting that they are a kind of "divinely inspired utterance or discourse" ("Prophecy"). They may be spiritually powerful, but not literally true.¹³⁴ In the end, *A Tale of Two Cities* relies upon the generic reassurance and hope provided by the structure of the Christian story and of the comedic Victorian novel while introducing enough indeterminacy so as not to close off the suffering at the heart of the novel.¹³⁵

Although Dickens's trauma novel is certainly more hopeful than *Matilda*

¹³⁴ In his analysis of Carlyle's approach to the prophetic in history, Rosenberg points out that "Contrary to the common misunderstanding, the Prophets were not primarily predictive, not soothsayers. Rather . . . their essential work was as interpreters of God's Word and proclaimers of His Will as revealed in time" (49).

¹³⁵ Vanden Bossche also examines the way in which "the latter events are foretold in ambiguously voiced prophetic speeches that put this traditional Christian moment of closure into question" (210). He maintains that, in recognizing the human need for closure, while incorporating a degree of resistance to it, the novel expresses "a newly evolving understanding between narrative and world, that narrative constitutes the world" (211).

or *The Woman in White*, it too demonstrates that psychological pain cannot easily be healed or narrated away. The novel combines novelistic, historical, and mythic structures because each alone is inadequate to represent suffering and subjectivity. Indeed, the complexity and ambiguity of this tentative narrative solution highlight the seriousness of the problems with representation and with human subjectivity that the novel explores. Indeed, *A Tale of Two Cities* implies that only a radical experiential shift will solve the problem of traumatic human suffering. It identifies the need for an entirely new form of human experience that transcends the bounded middle-class subjectivity of Manette and the unbound working-class subjectivity of the Defarges, beyond the extremes of isolated trauma, on the one hand, and communal violence, on the other. By combining reassuring closure with openness to interpretation, the novel's conclusion enacts this balance at the level of narrative form.

CHAPTER 4

Tracing Traumatic Memory in *The Woman in White*: Victorian Science and the Narrative Strategy of the Shadow-*Bildungsroman*

In November of 1859, Wilkie Collins's novel *The Woman in White* began serialization in Dickens's new periodical *All the Year Round*, following immediately after the final chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities*. In more ways than one, Collins picks up where Dickens leaves off, reworking Dickens's interest in Association psychology and in the effect of psychic shock on memory and identity. Like Dickens's Dr. Manette, Collins's traumatized character Laura Fairlie experiences dissociation, memory loss, and psychic fragmentation as a result of unjust imprisonment. As in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the mysterious events leading up to and resulting from this trauma structure the narrative, while at the same time proving resistant to the conventions of the *bildungsroman* and domestic novel.

Despite these similarities, *The Woman in White* transposes Dickens's anxiety about the horrors of the historical past onto a very contemporary setting. Collins's murderous plots, secret crimes, and evil villains are inspired more directly by the latest headlines than by historical tomes. While sensation novels like *The Woman in White* may still unsettle modern readers, Victorian reviewers located their power in their exploitation of contemporary settings and issues. In an 1863 review of sensation novels, Henry Mansel explains the effect of this "proximity" (487) and argues for the relatively benign effect of history reading in comparison: while "Livy's narrative of the secret poisonings carried on by nearly

two hundred Roman ladies” inspires little reaction, “we are thrilled with horror ... by the thought that such things may be going on around us and among us” (489). According to Mansel, sensation fiction is more disturbing than historiography because it unsettles familiar interpretive modes and undermines expectations about the health, sanity, and moral uprightness of friends and neighbours.¹³⁶

The Woman in White certainly follows this pattern as the seemingly respectable Sir Percival Glyde plots to steal the fortune of his wife, Laura, by locking her up in a lunatic asylum under another woman’s name. Laura’s friends and family initially repress all suspicion of Percival, and their interpretive complacency and wilful blindness to signs of his depravity are no doubt responsible for much of the novel’s creeping horror. Yet Laura’s mysterious experiences in the asylum are perhaps even more haunting than Percival’s actions and, unlike Percival’s secret guilt, Laura’s secret trauma is never revealed. Laura is locked up in an ostensibly benign and peaceful country asylum, cared for by modern doctors who nonetheless fragment her identity and leave her with severe cognitive impairment. After Laura’s half-sister, Marian Halcombe, rescues Laura, her memory loss and emotional fragility prevent her from ever discovering the details of what happened in the asylum. Laura therefore cannot construct the kind of coherent life story that the *bildungsroman* posits as a precondition for psychological growth and integrated identity. In his depiction of Laura’s traumatic experiences, then, Collins unsettles more than his readers’ expectations about

¹³⁶ For analyses of this proximate and contemporary quality in sensation fiction, see Patrick Brantlinger, “What is ‘Sensational’ about the ‘Sensation Novel’?” and Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s*.

their neighbours. His depiction of Laura's incurable psychic fragmentation calls into question the efficacy of modern medicine to cure psychological ailments and unsettles assumptions about psychological cohesion and character development from contemporary novels.

The Woman in White could, arguably, be interpreted from a psychoanalytic or trauma theory perspective. Laura suffers a variety of symptoms that twentieth-century clinicians have associated with psychological trauma, and the novel's structure and narrative techniques, including the obsessive use of doubles and a repetitive structure filled with gaps, resemble those that modern trauma theorists have identified as characteristic of trauma narratives.¹³⁷ Judith Sanders makes use of trauma theory in her analysis of *The Woman in White*, arguing that the novel "explores the consequences of a marginalized male's accommodation to gender conventions by imagining the attainment of idealized normalcy as a gauntlet of traumatic shocks" (iii). In a similar vein, Robert E. Lougy claims that Walter struggles with a deep-seated Oedipal trauma: "The Wordsworthian echoes that reverberate through Walter's voice anticipate not only the sense of wanting that haunts Collins's text, but also the wounded quality that Collins, as well as Lacan, finds to be constitutive of our relation to the world" (127-8). Considering the sensation novel's strategy of rendering suspicious the contemporary and proximate, however, Collins's depiction of Laura's and Walter's traumatic experiences may be examined more productively in the

¹³⁷ See, in particular, Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History*; Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*; and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*.

context of theories of mental functioning that had currency when the novel was written. Following Mansel's emphasis on the way sensation novels estrange readers from familiar or comforting assumptions about friends and neighbours, I argue that *The Woman in White* estranges readers from contemporary medical and novelistic discourses. An attention to these discourses reveals the way Collins problematizes a variety of diagnostic and therapeutic frameworks to suggest that intense and shocking suffering may be inexplicable and incurable.

A familiarity with nineteenth-century medical and philosophical writing on memory and cognition illuminates a web of psychologically informed imagery and vocabulary in *The Woman in White*. Collins makes particularly persistent use of medical and philosophical writing on "double consciousness" and the doctrine of Associationism in depicting shocked and wounded characters. While the novel relies upon these psychological models, it also draws attention to the contradictions between and within them, dramatizing contemporary ideological tensions by embodying incompatible scientific and philosophical discourses within individual characters. Collins lifts conflicting contemporary beliefs from their separate and internally consistent philosophical and medical frameworks, and then throws them all together to suggest the multiple possibilities for interpretation of character and incident that are essential to the compellingly paranoid tone of the sensation novel.¹³⁸ The novel also mimics the conventions of

¹³⁸ In her important study *In the Secret Theatre of Home*, Jenny Bourne Taylor examines the manner in which Collins incorporates a variety of psychological discourses into his novels as a narrative strategy. She argues that in *The Woman in White*, Collins undermines the binary distinctions between, for instance, sanity and insanity, and the asylum and the home, upon which psychological theories, social structures, and bourgeois subjectivity were based. I argue that, in

contemporary domestic novels and *bildungsromane*, thereby raising readers' expectations that Laura will be diagnosed and cured, and that she will live happily ever after. Yet by combining competing models of selfhood from contemporary medicine and novels, Collins undermines both realms' explanatory and interpretive power.

In *The Woman in White*, as in the other novels of trauma I examine in this dissertation, spatial images represent the contours of selfhood, the confines of a socially defined and bounded subjectivity that is the precondition for trauma. Laura is shut up in several country houses and a country asylum, and, in each of these spaces, she is told who she is, whom to marry, and how to behave. She is repeatedly boxed into a series of contradictory identities that she cannot reconcile, thus leading to dissociation and fragmentation. Her experiences recall those of Miss Milner and Matilda in *A Simple Story*, each of whom is repeatedly imprisoned in domestic spaces and in the identities they represent. Yet although Inchbald problematizes this process, demonstrating the way it flattens out character, she does not pathologize it. In *A Simple Story*, the process of locking women into an identity not of their own devising is presented as socially and aesthetically problematic, but at the same time, medical theories of women's natural sensibility and need for masculine protection normalized this process. In the nineteenth century, these gendered assumptions continued to be influential, but the normal and healthy model of selfhood was increasingly associated with strong willpower and internal cohesion. Though Victorian doctors frequently

addition to breaking down such distinctions, Collins jumbles competing and at times contradictory theories and their ideological assumptions against one another to increase narrative tension.

emphasize human permeability, they also often understand this permeability as a cause or sign of weakness, as a problem to be solved. Laura's painful experience of identity fragmentation is traumatic, then, in light of the nineteenth-century medical and novelistic pathologization of the compromised will and of divided selfhood. My central argument is that nineteenth-century trauma novels, including *The Woman in White*, emphasize the difficulty in overcoming and making sense of shocking events and reveal the challenge trauma poses to self-determining, individual selfhood. This chapter argues that the threat to this contemporary model of selfhood is the source of the unease that Collins's sensation novel provokes.

i. Wilkie Collins and Nineteenth-Century Science

Collins took a keen interest in contemporary scientific ideas and debates, frequently using them as fodder for his sensation fiction. In the prefaces and postscripts to several of his novels, he implies that his bizarre and thrilling plots are based on scientifically verifiable facts that his extensive research and reading make him uniquely qualified to represent. In his preface to *The Moonstone*, he defends his depiction of the "physiological experiment" on which the narrative turns by claiming that he "ascertained, not only from books, but from living authorities as well, what the result of that experiment would really have been"

(3).¹³⁹ Similarly, in the postscript to *Armadale*, he claims:

¹³⁹ Collins is referring here to Ezra Jennings' experimental demonstration of the existence of unconscious mental processes. More specifically, Jennings attempts to prove his theory that Franklin Blake stole the moonstone while in an opium trance and then forgot about the incident. In order to convince Blake and others of the truth of this radical claim, Jennings stages an

Wherever the story touches on questions connected with Law, Medicine, or Chemistry, it has been submitted, before publication, to the experience of professional men. The kindness of a friend supplied me with a plan of the Doctor's Apparatus—and I saw the chemical ingredients at work, before I ventured on describing the action of them in the closing scenes of this book. (817-8)

Heart and Science contains not one, but two prefaces, one for “readers in general” and another for the suspicious and sceptical (read medical) “readers in particular” (38). In the latter, Collins notes that the draft was sent to a surgeon for correction, but he does not defer all authority to medical men and instead details his own “promiscuous reading” on the subject (39). He asks, “let me spare you a long list of books consulted and of newspapers and magazines mutilated for ‘cuttings,’” and provides a few choice examples of medical texts and authors consulted in his research for the novel (39). This bid for scientific authority functions to ensure the verisimilitude of the scientific theories and practices that Collins frequently incorporates into his texts. For instance, in *Armada*, Dr. Hawbury explicates what seems to be an ominously prophetic dream by linking each image in the dream to something in the dreamer's recent memory. This pragmatic approach to dream analysis recalls that of the physician Robert Macnish who, in his 1834 monograph *The Philosophy of Sleep*, goes through a remarkably similar process of explication with one of his own dreams.¹⁴⁰ Collins thus roots his bizarre plots

experimental reenactment of the key events of the night of the theft, and once Blake is given opium, he proceeds to attempt to steal the gem again.

¹⁴⁰ Lyn Pykett also points out that Hawbury's understanding of dreams is in line with that commonly accepted by Victorian physicians, including John Abercrombie and Macnish (174).

in the allegedly solid ground of medical knowledge.

Collins's novels therefore seem ripe for an analysis of their engagement with scientific ideas. In *Sex in Mind: The Gendered Brain in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Mental Sciences*, Rachel Malane interprets *The Woman in White* as a demonstration of nineteenth-century medical theories about gendered brain function (111-156). Malane sees in Collins's text a consistent and uncomplicated novelistic rendering of scientific discourse. Yet, despite Collins's claims to scientific literacy, he frequently uses scientific concepts in a haphazard manner, mixing them together with one another and with other ideologically opposed pseudo-scientific, paranormal, and metaphysical discourses. In *Armada*, Dr. Hawbury's rationalist explanation of Alan's dream, as well as Alan's own pragmatically materialist explanation of it as the result of indigestion, are dramatically opposed to an equally viable supernatural interpretation. *Heart and Science* concerns an imaginary rather than a real medical advance. As Lyn Pykett points out, the scientific demonstration that solves the mystery in *The Moonstone* resembles a mesmeric parlour trick (172). In this novel, Collins also appropriates a variety of contradictory scientific concepts in Ezra Jennings' explanation of how Franklin Blake could have stolen the eponymous gem in an opium trance but still unconsciously retain the traces of that experience. For professional validation of his assertion of the existence of unconscious memory, Jennings produces two long passages from the physicians William Carpenter and John Elliotson. The conflation of these two men is certainly a strange one. Carpenter was a successful and well-respected researcher, debunker of the pseudo-sciences of phrenology and mesmerism, while Elliotson was a discredited proponent of both these concepts.

Both Pykett and Jenny Bourne Taylor argue that in this instance, Collins finds the underlying agreement between two competing medical practitioners in order to put their ideas to his own narrative use (Pykett 171, Bourne Taylor 183-4).

However, despite both scientists' belief in the existence of unconscious mental processes, there is little underlying theoretical agreement to be found between their methodologies or ideas about human physiology. Collins selectively pieces together bits of their theories that are contradictory when understood in context.¹⁴¹

Indeed, a closer examination of the preface to *Heart and Science* reveals a self-aware admission of this indiscriminate use of scientific ideas. While, on one level, this preface clearly functions as a bid for scientific authority, it at the same time contains Collins's tongue in cheek revelation of his irreverent approach to scientific writing. His reading is not merely wide, but "promiscuous" (39), which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "done or applied with no regard for method, order, etc.; random, indiscriminate, unsystematic" and "consisting of assorted parts or elements grouped or massed together without order; mixed and disorderly in composition or character; . . . of various kinds mixed together" ("Promiscuous," def. 1a and 2). Perhaps even more revealing is the way Collins humorously casts himself in the role of a sadistic killer, "mutilating" periodicals for "cuttings" (39). This preface hints at the violence involved in ripping scientific images and ideas out of their original discursive contexts. I argue that Collins also slices up and re-stitches medical discourses in *The Woman in White*, and that the

¹⁴¹ As Lawrence Rothfield points out, "a novelist such as Collins may use popularized psychiatric concepts . . . in a confused way, but these concepts nonetheless contribute, in ways worth thinking about, to the construction of the novel's sensationalistic reality" (10).

violence of this scientific mutilation mirrors the violence of Laura's trauma. Collins recombines scientific ideas in such a way as to defy notions of internal cohesion and consistency, a process that reflects Laura's fragmentation of identity. The novel combines ideas about double consciousness, somnambulism, mesmerism, animal reflexes, memory science and philosophy, drug chemistry, the physiological effects of sudden fright, the psychological treatment method of moral management, and the doctrine of Associationism. It draws from medical, psychological, and philosophical discourses, from fringe and authoritative camps, and from the specialist and popular press. As I explain in greater detail below, these contradictory and fragmented snippets of scientific discourse cannot solve any of the problems the narrative raises and the novel thus implies medicine's limited power to heal the traumatized psyche.

ii. Generic Mimicry and the Shadow-*Bildungsroman*

In addition to incorporating a range of competing scientific discourses, *The Woman in White* superficially imitates the conventions of several dominant Victorian novelistic genres. Indeed, Collins frequently incorporates scientific language into the novel to undercut the ideological assumptions upon which such novelistic conventions are based. Many nineteenth-century *bildungsromane* epitomize a Lockean belief in the importance of cohesive memory to selfhood. If, as John Locke argued, the self is a product of experience, then examining one's past becomes key to self-awareness. Reflective protagonists like Jane Eyre and David Copperfield assert their identities by remembering, narrating, and making sense of their lives. *The Woman in White* copies the rough outlines of this process

as its multiple narrators record their experiences in order to re-establish Laura's identity. Yet this record of experience is not, as in the *bildungsroman*, part of an abstract process of identity-formation or self-actualization; instead, it represents the only way for Laura to reclaim her name and legal identity. After Percival imprisons Laura's half-sister, Anne, under Laura's name, and Anne subsequently dies, Laura barely knows who she is and remembers very little of her past. Laura's friends must therefore reconstruct the chronology of events leading up to her incarceration in order to prove that Laura is still alive and that her husband's story is false. In a very literal way, then, remembering and narrating her experiences is the only way for Laura to identify herself.

In a similarly Lockean fashion, Victorian psychological theorists also note the inscribable quality of the mind and the importance of experience in shaping character, but they come to radically different conclusions than those suggested by the *bildungsroman*. Instead of emphasizing the importance of narrating one's life story, many Victorian psychologists and doctors instead assert that thinking about horrifying experiences can be dangerous to identity and sanity; to remember pain is to experience it anew and to inscribe it more deeply on the mind. Collins uses scientifically informed vocabulary and patterns of imagery throughout *The Woman in White* to imply that this psychological danger in remembering is why Laura cannot tell her own story or piece together the details of her imprisonment. She must remember what happened to her to regain her name and social status, but she cannot remember what happened to her if she wants to regain the emotional stability required for a deeper sense of identity. This contradiction between the novelistic assumption of the importance of memory to identity and

the medical assertion of its perils supplies an important source of narrative tension.

Collins also gestures towards the autonomous and cohesive interiority typical of characters in contemporary psychological novels. Although realist texts often foreground the effect of experience on the psyche, protagonists like Jane Eyre nonetheless seem to have a private consciousness, an inner window seat from which to examine such experiences. Raymond Williams has noted the psychological novel's "assumption of a ... radically distinguishable *inner world*" (*Keywords* 209). Michael Kearns argues that what differentiates Victorian psychology from the Victorian psychological novel is the psychologists' contrasting assertion that "mental phenomena were primarily analogous to if not actually driven by phenomena of the external world. This was the import of association psychology [and] of physiological investigations" (133). It also serves as a better descriptor of mental phenomena in *The Woman in White* than Williams's description of the psychological novel. Collins's multiple narrators do have a degree of reflective interiority, and their diary entries give readers access to their secret thoughts and fears. Yet Collins ultimately denies his characters the discrete inner space in which the work of conscious reflection can occur and in which autonomous, thoughtful, and reasoned choices can be made. As I will argue below in greater detail, their thoughts are driven by their experiences, and their damaged psyches operate according to mechanical physiological processes over which they have little control. The boundaries of personal identity are repeatedly violated in the novel, and Collins alludes to contemporary writing on double consciousness and Associationism to imply that the outside world can trap his

characters, split them in two, and imprint itself on them. In creating a tension between the characters' compulsive behaviour and their attempts at self-assertion through reflection, Collins takes advantage of the widespread contemporary anxiety that humans are mere sensory apparata, controlled and directed by the world around them.

The differentiation between the autonomous will and automatic bodily processes was highly fraught and eroded slowly over the course of the nineteenth century.¹⁴² Roger Smith describes the “attempt to defend individual human agency and the sacredness of personality even while welcoming a new science of physiology which, many feared, had the potential to undermine these values” (81). Smith quotes J.M. Capes's 1858 essay in *The Rambler*, which insists that “the existence of the will in man . . . is alone sufficient to distinguish him from the lower animals and to constitute him a religious and responsible agent;” Smith reveals that, within this context, “a science that described ‘will’ as the outcome of nervous processes is a provocation” (81). In a similar vein, Rick Rylance describes the Victorian response to this provocation: “a powerful faction in the philosophy of mind” worked to

promote senior higher faculties, such as ‘Consciousness’ (of the transcendental variety) and ‘Will’ (also fronted with an imposing capital letter by, for instance, the Unitarian physiologist William

¹⁴² For discussions of the importance of the idea of human will in Victorian psychology and culture and of the concern over the challenge posed to it by physiological investigations, see Edward S. Reed, *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James*; John R. Reed, *Victorian Will*; Rick Rylance, “‘The Disturbing Anarchy of Investigation’: Psychological Debate and the Victorian Periodical;” and Roger Smith, “The Physiology of the Will: Mind, Body, and Psychology in the Periodical Literature, 1855–1875.”

Benjamin Carpenter) with the same vigour as the ‘Soul’, in order to accommodate the increasingly worldly, and ominously materialist, assumptions of the new psychology” that was biologizing and mechanizing more and more aspects of the human self. (245-6)

Medical discourse had begun to eat away at the belief in a presiding human will and independent consciousness upon which many psychological novels relied, and even the mid-century scientific community was preoccupied with reclaiming this view of selfhood. Collins achieves his ominous effect by playing off of the novelistic expectation of self-determining and reflective interiority while exploiting the widespread contemporary anxiety about biological automatism.

The Woman in White’s representation of psychic shock also challenges novelistic assumptions about the connection between individuals and the social realm. Scholars have frequently noted the nineteenth-century British novel’s disciplinary function, its portrayal of individualistic, bourgeois subjectivity as attainable only through integration into the social institutions of marriage and family and into economic and domestic productivity (Moretti; Armstrong). According to Franco Moretti, the role of the *bildungsroman* is “to *build* the ego” in such a way that “formation as an individual” eventually “coincides without rifts with one’s social integration” (Moretti 11, 16). While such novels may initially cast society as a threat to self-development and personal freedom, they ultimately suggest that the surrender of aimless freedom for a place in the social sphere constitutes the highest manifestation of individual identity and liberty.

On one level, this formulation seems appropriate to *The Woman in White*.

When the youthful and purposeless Walter falls in love with Laura, class distinctions and family interference prevent their union, and so Walter must endure a series of trials to build character and find a place within the social order.¹⁴³ The novel ends on an ostensibly happy note with Walter and Laura's marriage, a new baby, and settlement in the family estate. Yet this *bildungsroman* plot is made terrifying by its juxtaposition with a shadow-*bildungsroman*: the story of the undoing of Laura's character. Collins foregrounds a character who possibly never recovers from wounds inflicted by her father, husband, and social institutions, all of which are supposed to guarantee identity. At no point in the novel is Laura free, and her imprisonment under another woman's name is just a more melodramatic version of earlier events, such as her father's control over her choice of marriage partner (and thus home and name) and her first husband's imprisonment of her at his estate. Over and over again, she is trapped in spaces that determine her identity and negate her self-determination. At Limmeridge, her father's dying wish binds her to an engagement with a man she does not love. At Blackwater Park, Percival traps her, using violence and intimidation to try to scare her into complete passivity and compliance with his plans. At the asylum, doctors lock her up and try to force her to believe she is Anne Catherick. In each house, she is trapped in a different socially imposed identity, shifting from Laura Fairlie to Lady Glyde to Anne Catherick in turn. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, houses and buildings are frequently linked to the individualistic

¹⁴³ Lougy argues that "Walter's exile is his way of seeking expiation ... for illicit desires frustrated by paternal interdiction. . . . After returning from his travels, Walter no longer speaks with the voice of the son, but rather speaks with that of the father, as he strives to articulate and legitimize kinship structure and filiation by exposing those, like Fosco and Percival Glyde, who have attempted to falsify or erase such lines" (125).

model of selfhood that arose in the late eighteenth century, to the bounded ego that Moretti argues the *bildungsroman* works to establish. Laura's forced movements from home to home thus signify the contradiction between the nineteenth-century valorization of intact identity and the control exerted over women's homes and life choices. This process of removal from one domestic space to another, and one set of identity expectations to another, fragments Laura, leaving her with memory loss, cognitive impairment, and emotional fragility. At the end of the novel, she seems to recover her faculties, but she is unable to recover her memory or full sense of self. She never builds the self-determining and socially integrated ego that the *bildungsroman* posits as an ideal.

Similarly, despite Walter's triumphant assumption of a higher status and more conventionally masculine character, he too is deeply damaged by the traumatic experiences he witnesses and narrates, experiences from which, I will argue, he never recovers. While seeming to hold out the *bildungsroman*'s promise of intact and socially harmonious individual identity, the novel lays bare the social structures that destroy instead of protect selfhood. A thorough examination of Collins's deployment of contemporary psychological discourses in his depiction of Laura's and Walter's tortured mental processes therefore illuminates how his sensation novel perverts the *bildungsroman* and the ideology of reflective and socially harmonious individualism upon which it relies.

iii. Shock, Double Consciousness, and the Problem of Memory

The novel offers its clearest challenge to coherent and self-determining individualism through the uncanny doubling of Laura and Anne. Not only do

these half-sisters look remarkably similar but they are also subjected to many of the same horrors. They are wrongfully incarcerated in the same lunatic asylum and lose their identities when they are forced to change places with one another. Their responses to these events differ dramatically, however. When Anne catches the first hint of suspicion of the identity-swapping plot against them, she experiences immediate awareness and physical consequences, while Laura's symptoms are belated and psychological.¹⁴⁴ Although Anne is preternaturally aware of what is happening, sensing danger well before anyone expects her to do so, Laura is drugged and barely conscious when she is taken to the asylum. While Anne's fear-induced convulsions and heart attack lead to her death, Laura is left with a vague sense of having been wounded by something she cannot recall. Collins seems to imply something akin to traumatic dissociation by splitting his wounded character in two: one sister experiences the shock and the other suffers the long-term consequences of it.

Twentieth-century trauma theorists have noted that trauma victims experience a feeling of doubling and dissociation as a result of their inability to assimilate the horror of the traumatic moment; the mind protects itself by cordoning the trauma off in an inner other.¹⁴⁵ Yet Collins exploits a uniquely

¹⁴⁴ Clearly Anne does suffer long-term pain after her first confinement in the asylum but it is difficult to sort out a clear causal relationship between her treatment in the asylum and her later behaviour. When Walter first meets her, he surmises "either that she was naturally flighty and unsettled, or that some recent shock of terror had disturbed the balance of her faculties" (Collins 28). It eventually becomes clear that she has had some sort of cognitive delay her whole life, but it is impossible to know whether her strange behaviour is symptomatic of the horrors of the asylum or of her pre-existing cognitive impairment.

¹⁴⁵ Caruth argues that many trauma victims feel a sense of belatedness and dissociation, an inability to "fully witness the event as it occurs" (*Explorations* 6). Amanda Claybaugh has pointed out that this inability to witness is associated with doubling and substitution in the writings of

Victorian conception of psychic doubling in his characterization of Laura and Anne. “Double consciousness,” the pathological splitting of the self into two distinct consciousnesses, first emerged in European medical discourse in the late eighteenth century and continued to appear in Victorian psychological and philosophical texts. As Dror Wahrman points out, divided consciousness could only be pathologized at this point, after the emergence of the new identity regime that posited coherent selfhood as the standard, healthy state, against which all other modes of cognition were judged wanting (278). This medicalization of duality contrasts sharply with eighteenth-century assumptions about the divisible nature of identity, since divided consciousness “was a state in which [David] Garrick was reputed to have found himself regularly, and that Adam Smith had attributed to every moral person” (Wahrman 278). By contrast, Collins’s description of Laura’s symptomatology incorporates elements of double consciousness in order to emphasize the disturbing implications of split selfhood. Laura’s experience is frightening and traumatic not only because it splits her in two, but also because Victorian culture posited healthy identity as unified and coherent.

The most famous case of “double consciousness, or a duality of person in the same individual” was of an American girl named Mary Reynolds. It was first related by S.L. Mitchell in 1816, and was reprinted and reinterpreted frequently

Freud, Primo Levi, Dori Laub, Jared Stark, Amy Hungerford, and Shoshana Felman. As Claybaugh notes, these authors use parallel terms, such as the “double,” the “substitute,” the “proxy,” the “surrogate,” and the “witness within the self,” and “all of these accounts imagine some kind of substitute to fill the absence that constitutes the structure of trauma” (48–49).

over the course of the century in both the medical and popular press.¹⁴⁶ According to Mitchell, Mary “fell into a profound sleep” and awoke having “lost every trait of acquired knowledge” (qtd. in Macnish 185). After re-learning how to read and write, getting to know her family and friends, and manifesting a distinct personality, she had “another fit of somnolency” and awoke to her original identity (185). After this point, she would transition from one state to another, with no memory of what happened to her in the alternate states. In 1849, T. Ogier Ward related the similar case of Mary Parker, a 13-year-old girl who developed double consciousness after a period of ill health, delirium, and hysterical catalepsy:

Double consciousness is now established, for while delirious, she has little or no recollection of persons she has seen, or events which have occurred during the state of sanity, nor does she complain of any bodily pain or suffering. In the opposite state, on the contrary, she is extremely depressed, incompetent to any exertion, complains of pain in her head, side, and stomach, and is equally forgetful of all that has passed during the delirium. (457)

Each of these young girls manifests two consciousnesses, a division the physicians treating them see as a major problem.

While many nineteenth-century doctors treated double consciousness as an

¹⁴⁶ See, for instance, “A Communication Made by Dr. Mitchell to the Rev. Dr. Nott,” *The New Jerusalem Church Repository*; George Combe, *A System of Phrenology*; Blanchard Fosgate, *Sleep, Psychologically Considered with Reference to Sensation and Memory*; and Forbes Winslow, *On Obscure Diseases of the Brain, and Disorders of the Mind*.

unsolvable mystery, some linked it to states of somnambulism or trance,¹⁴⁷ and theorized that it would occur when one part of the brain fell asleep while another part remained awake, just as a sleepwalker's faculties of perception could lie dormant while the ability to direct motion might be active.¹⁴⁸ This understanding of the condition followed from the phrenological understanding of the brain as a composite of distinct and sometimes competing parts. A newer theory advanced by Henry Holland of "the brain as a double organ" (179) was also influential, and developing Holland's theories, A.L. Wigan argued that the two spheres of the brain constitute two fully functional and separate brains that are trained to work in concert but that could fall out of synch. Wigan attributes dreams and somnambulism to "the difference in the degree of somnolency of the two brains" (273). Even those Victorian philosophers who, unlike Wigan and Holland, believed in an indivisible mind nonetheless thought that somnambulant states could produce a divided consciousness. For example, the influential Victorian philosopher Sir William Hamilton explains that "It is the peculiarity of somnambulism . . . that we have no recollection, when we awake, of what has occurred during its continuance. Consciousness is thus cut in two; memory does

¹⁴⁷ For instance, in *Sleep and Dreams* (1851), John Addington Symonds describes double consciousness as follows: "The person sees, hears, walks, has, in fact, the ordinary attributes of the waking state, and yet is not awake. He may pass from that condition into ordinary slumber, and then wake up like other people; or the transition may be from the morbid condition to the ordinary waking state without intermediate sleep. This is double consciousness" (22). Similarly, while not completely equating the conditions, Ward notes that "[v]iewed physiologically, double consciousness is connected most closely with dreaming and somnambulism" (460-1) and, to a lesser degree, to "drunkenness" (461).

¹⁴⁸ Robert Macnish explains that "in simple dreaming . . . some of the cerebral organs are awake, while others continue in the quiescence of sleep. Such, also, is the case in somnambulism, but with this addition, that the dream is of so forcible a nature as to stimulate into action the muscular system as well as, in most cases, one or more of the organs of the senses" (159).

not connect the train of consciousness in the one state with the train of consciousness in the other” (I: 320).

Double consciousness and other trance states were generally believed to occur as a result of a physical malady, but there are links to be made with modern ideas of traumatic dissociation. Some physicians argued that trance states like double consciousness could follow or constitute the experience of shock, as a protective mechanism to deal with the over-stimulation of emotional excitement. The surgeon W.C. Dendy asserts that “*Shock* will often at once strike down as it were the very life of a being, inducing syncope, trance, or epilepsy” (269).¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Wigan calls the “state of torpor” following shock “a moral concussion” (303). He claims that “a violent shock from terror ... [,] sudden detection in a crime,” or “extravagant grief” might cause portions of the brain to fall asleep while others remained awake (268).¹⁵⁰ Ward notes that double consciousness usually occurs in “young females in whom the uterine functions were disturbed, or, if in the male sex, where the nervous system had been weakened by excesses, terror, or other cerebral excitement” (458). Although Ian Hacking differentiates sharply between nineteenth-century conceptions of double consciousness and twentieth-century diagnoses of traumatic dissociation and multiple personality disorder, he admits that, in this line, Ward seems to be talking about “boys who

¹⁴⁹ Catalepsy is a deeper form of trance than somnambulism, in which all ability to move or control one’s limbs is lost, while the mind remains active. Syncope is a temporary loss of consciousness, like fainting. Macnish makes the same association between shock and trance as Wigan in *The Philosophy of Sleep* (102).

¹⁵⁰ Macnish and Ward also make similar connections between shock and trance states or double consciousness. Despite these links between overwhelming experiences and trance in Victorian psychological literature, Matus argues that “the connections among terror and shock, dissociation, and amnesia were made only indirectly” until the late nineteenth century (62).

have had traumatic experiences” (151). The fact that Wigan considers shock as analogous to a concussion and Ward compares it to a uterine disruption indicates an essentially physicalist orientation, however. In double consciousness, the self does not split as a psychologically protective mechanism. Shock is a physiological experience with physiological consequences. If part of the brain goes to sleep, it is akin either to brain damage or to the physically advantageous properties of a coma to an accident victim. The main difference between double consciousness and psychoanalytic understandings of repression, dissociation, and split personality is that it was understood as a physiological condition as opposed to a psychological response to painful experience.

While *The Woman in White* contains no scenes of Mary Reynolds-style double consciousness, Laura does fall into a trance-like somnambulant state as a result of the shocks she undergoes.¹⁵¹ She seems to be living in a fog or dream, unable to remember most of her past life and unable to think or act for herself. She is “insensible” (488), and her memory and spirits must be “roused” (439, 443, 488) from “the blank of her existence” (443). In Laura’s rare moments of self-determination, she behaves like a sleepwalker, motivated by some inner drama and unaffected by the external world. Walter describes insistence on revisiting her mother’s grave as follows: “They had passed the hill above the churchyard, when [Laura] insisted on turning back to look her last at her mother’s grave. Miss Halcombe tried to shake her resolution; but, in this one instance, tried in vain. She

¹⁵¹ Dames notes that, in *The Woman in White*, “Any surprise, even the most genteel, has an instant (and usually noted) amnesiac consequence” (191). A familiarity with the concept of double consciousness illuminates the way in which these amnesiac consequences come as a result of the characters slipping into trance-like somnolent states.

was immovable. Her dim eyes lit with a sudden fire, and flashed through the veil that hung over them” (439).¹⁵² Walter and Marian are afraid to rouse her too suddenly, so they take her to places where “there [is] nothing to confuse or alarm her” (444). They are wary of removing her from “repose” and of “rous[ing] the painful impressions of her past life which [they] had so carefully hushed to rest” (444). What memory she has is “vague and unreliable ... [,] presented in fragments, sadly incoherent in themselves, and widely detached from each other” (435, 433). Walter notes that Laura’s mind “confusedly presented to her something which she had only intended to do in the false light of something which she had really done” (445), much like in a dream. In his discussion of double consciousness, Victorian physician John Addington Symonds asks,

What, then, is the test of healthy waking or consciousness? To the individual himself, one state is as healthy as the other; but we, observing him, take a different view. Our test is the correspondence of his perceptions with our own, or with those which ordinary people receive from the external world. Common opinion is the necessary standard. (26)

Walter compares Laura’s mental state to this standard and finds it wanting; her “confused and fragmentary” memory is “difficult to reconcile with any reasonable probability” (435).

During her traumatic imprisonment, Laura’s shock therefore propels her

¹⁵² During the fire at the vestry, Walter describes Percival’s shocked manservant in similarly somnambulant terms: “The only man who never moved was the servant. There he stood, his eyes still fastened on the flames in a changeless, vacant stare. I spoke to him, I shook him by the arm. He was past rousing” (530).

into a somnambulant trance that cuts her off from her memories of her terrible experience. This trance-state destroys her agency and personal identity in a way that resembles the loss of self-control and self-consciousness involved in mesmerism. Indeed, in Victorian medical discourse, mesmerism was often understood as an externally imposed form of double consciousness. In his explication of the case of Mary Parker, for example, Ward argues that, “To those who have witnessed them, the phenomena of mesmerism will doubtless here suggest themselves as being analogous, if not almost identical, with this condition” of double consciousness (460). Like mesmerism, Laura’s double consciousness is also externally imposed; her asylum doctors induce her trance state and fragmentation, essentially mesmerizing her into accepting that she is Anne Catherick.¹⁵³ She claims that they “tried to make [her] forget everything” (422), including her very identity. They imprison her in this alternate identity as they imprison her in the asylum. Carpenter describes a similar trick of “control over the memory” achieved in mesmeric trance:

The subject is assured that he cannot remember the most familiar thing, his own name for example And the abolition of the sense of personal identity (Mr. A. believing himself to be Mrs. B., or Mrs. C. believing herself to be Mr. D., and acting in conformity with that belief) is induced in the same mode; the assurance being continually repeated, until it has taken full possession of the mind

¹⁵³ For a detailed analysis of *The Woman in White*’s connection to mesmerism, see Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*. Winter argues that the novel constitutes an experiment in mesmeric mental control and points out that Victorian readers of *The Woman in White* “reported involuntary reactions,” in particular feelings of being rapt or spellbound (324). The novel therefore gives readers a small sample of the forced dissociation Laura experiences.

of the ‘subject,’ who cannot so direct his thoughts as to bring his familiar experience to antagonize and dispel the illusive idea thus forced upon him. (626)¹⁵⁴

Without knowing it, the doctors and nurses at Laura’s asylum attempt essentially the same thing. When doctors make a mistake, moral (mis)management becomes forced dissociation; benevolent mental control becomes its nefarious mesmeric double.¹⁵⁵ Laura is traumatized by a kind of institutionalized mental identity theft.

In addition to describing Laura’s symptoms in terms of the kind of sleepwalking trance associated with double consciousness, Collins also uses Laura’s relationship with her half-sister and double, Anne, to symbolize how shock can produce a divided consciousness. Although Laura forgets what happens to her, these experiences are actually stored in Anne’s consciousness. When Laura is abducted, she is shocked and drugged into a trance-like state of unawareness, while Anne consciously registers what is happening to them. After Anne’s death, Laura’s painful memories remain buried and are resurrected only in terrifying dreams. Though Laura’s waking self is somnolent and forgetful, her sleeping self is fully aware of what happened to her and is therefore strangely connected to her double Anne, who immediately understood the horror of their situation. Before her death, Anne also knew the dark truth about Percival’s evil character and told

¹⁵⁴ All references to Carpenter’s work in this chapter are to the 1855 edition of *Principles of Human Physiology*.

¹⁵⁵ Bourne Taylor makes a similar point, noting the way in which “‘the most horrible of all false imprisonments’ merges with, while being set against, ‘merciful control’” (101).

Walter of her forebodings about Laura's future.¹⁵⁶ Likewise, Laura's sleeping self communicates warnings to Walter; her tears during her nightmare flashbacks constitute an "unconscious appeal" to Walter to act for her in solving the mystery (577). While awake, Laura avoids having to relive the past; her pain is communicated automatically from her unconscious, Anne-like self.

The doubling of Anne and Laura is also uncannily similar to the relationship between Pesca and Fosco. Pesca's psychological avoidance of his memories of the Brotherhood and mental suffering once these memories are faced mirror Fosco's physical avoidance of the Brotherhood and suffering and death at their hands. Furthermore, Pesca is horrified at Walter's request that he tell him the story of his terrifying experience with the Brotherhood. In order to relate this suppressed memory, he must revert to his old language and, in effect, become the alternate, forgotten self to whom these events happened. His traumatic memories, like Laura's, are stored in an alternate self.

My focus on Laura's and Pesca's lost memories is at odds with the scholarly consensus that nineteenth-century theories of double consciousness were not particularly concerned with issues of memory. Hacking has argued that "Memory and forgetting were simply unimportant to what was known, in the English-speaking world, as double consciousness" (155). While he is correct to note that the condition was not studied within the framework of any kind of memory science (it was, in fact, understood primarily as a kind of brain damage

¹⁵⁶ Of course, Anne is under a delusional impression that she possesses Percival's secret, but this delusion is accompanied by a very correct understanding of Percival's concealed emotional monstrosity and his danger to Laura.

or with respect to sleep disorders), loss of memory was considered to be its key criterion. For instance, Ward writes of Mary Parker that “double consciousness is now established *for* she does not remember” (457, emphasis mine) and Hamilton argues that it is *because* of a loss of memory that “consciousness is thus cut in two” (I: 320). According to Addington Symonds, the self is constructed out of memories and habitual emotions, so when the memories and habits stored in one part of the brain fall asleep, one temporarily becomes another person (26).

Following Hacking, Nicholas Dames also asserts that double consciousness was “part of a preamnesiac pathology, in which if something is forgotten, it must be stored in a doubled version of the self, recoverable through a sudden or fortuitous switch back to that doubled self” (199). He argues that, in *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*,

Collins does not entirely rely on an older psychic category but instead ends his novels on the production of a new one, one that makes memory, its loss and recovery, the explicit topic of narrative in a way that double consciousness could never achieve. For the sufferer from double consciousness, memory is unproblematic, assumed, uninteresting: of course they might remember; how the ‘two selves’ might be integrated is the question Double consciousness becomes amnesia in Collins’s narratives of the 1860s, and Collins therefore anticipates a later, fundamental shift in the sciences of mind of the later nineteenth century. (200)

While this claim has some validity when Collins’s novels are read literally, it must ignore *The Woman in White*’s obsession with metaphorical doubling and its

connection to Laura's lost memory. Dames's argument also elides the way in which later memory science did not abandon the figure of the double. Freud's essay on "The Uncanny," trauma theory, and most understandings of Dissociative Identity Disorder rely upon this earlier model, in which lost memories are "stored in a doubled version of the self." In fact, in trying to ally Collins with newer models of mental functioning, Dames contends that nineteenth-century doctors were only concerned with how to integrate the two personalities, thus ironically transforming them into contemporary Dissociative Identity Disorder therapists. Victorian doctors were concerned with no such thing as integration. Since they considered the condition to be a form of sleep pathology, their main concern was to wake the patient up. Victorian doctors did not believe that a somnambulist who woke up would remember all of their past life, thereby integrating the two selves. Waking up instead entailed forgetting all that passed during the trance, regaining a memory only of events that passed before the event.¹⁵⁷

This state of partial remembrance could, however, be problematic.

Although it is not addressed within the medical discourse of double consciousness, Victorian Britain of course had a strong philosophical and scientific tradition linking conscious recollection to intelligence, self-awareness, and identity. According to Hamilton, "an undeniable condition of consciousness is

¹⁵⁷ Indeed, the entire plot of *The Moonstone* would have been negated if Victorian science stipulated that waking up from a somnambulant trance state entailed integration of the two selves. Franklin Blake steals the Moonstone during an opium-induced sleepwalking trance, and wakes with no memory of the event. Only once Ezra Jennings places him in a second somnambulant state can Franklin return to the thought patterns of that night. At this point, he attempts to steal the gem a second time. Although Jennings does try to give Franklin access to his sleepwalking self in order to solve the crime, other characters have to watch what Franklin does and says while in the second trance state, and report this information back to him later. He never remembers what happened during either trance.

memory Without memory, each indivisible, each infinitesimal, moment in the mental succession, would stand isolated from every other,—would constitute, in fact, a separate existence” (1: 205). Echoing the value system implicit in the *bildungsroman*, he argues that the “notion of the ego or self, arises from the recognized permanence and identity of the thinking subject The notion of self is, therefore, the result of memory” (1: 205). The influential Victorian scientist Herbert Spencer also argues that “states of consciousness” can only be called “intelligent” when one makes sense of them by integrating them with past states (332–23).¹⁵⁸ He writes that the “act of knowing [experiences] is impossible except by classing them with others of the same nature” and that “all mental action whatever is definable as *the continuous differentiation and integration of states of consciousness*” (332-3). By this definition, then, someone who wakes from a somnambulist trance can have no unified consciousness or intelligence unless they are able to recall and make sense of this experience. Laura remains “disconnected” (Collins 577) and essentially sub-human so long as she is unable to recollect her asylum experience. Her loss of social status, property, and name signify the erasure of identity arising from this state, and the novel depicts her loved ones’ attempts to piece together her past in order to retrieve her personhood.

On the other hand, the text suggests that part of Laura might better remain asleep, unaware or only marginally awake to the horror of her past. Instead of anticipating the Freudian belief in the value of unearthing traumatic memories or

¹⁵⁸ For an analysis of the Victorian belief in the importance of volitional and integrated memory to identity, morality, and sanity, see Sally Shuttleworth, “‘The malady of thought’: Embodied Memory in Victorian Psychology and the Novel.” Bourne Taylor also notes that, in the Victorian period, a “coherent moral identity was ... dependent on the continual struggle of the conscious mind to reclaim its obscure recesses” (61).

reflecting the *bildungsroman*'s emphasis on the importance of reflection to identity, Collins incorporates the contradictory Victorian claims that one must regain one's memories in order to be whole, and that such memories might challenge sanity itself. Proponents of moral management, influenced by Associationist doctrine, claimed that revisiting dangerous memories could make the emotions they evoke compulsive and permanent, thus negating the ability to self-govern.¹⁵⁹ Marian and Walter want to rouse Laura to an awareness of her new life and to a memory of the positive aspects of her former life, but to keep her painful memories "hushed" (444), cordoned off in her sleeping self.¹⁶⁰ Just as Dr. Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities* cannot think about the past without reverting to it, so too must Laura avoid remembering her imprisonment. Being semi-conscious turns Laura into a helpless child, but this state seems better than the alternative, which is to awake to her memories and thereby become her unstable double, Anne, who was preternaturally aware of evil all around her. Given the Victorian view that the marker of whether someone is awake or asleep is whether their perceptions agree with those accepted by common sense (see Addington Symonds), then Laura's memories would make her seem as delusional as Anne, so greatly would they conflict with received views of gentlemen's treatment of their wives and physicians' treatment of their patients. If knowing the truth can

¹⁵⁹ Moral management was a popular Victorian psychological treatment method. Its most important proponents were Dr. John Conolly and the Reverend John Barlow. See in particular Conolly's *An Inquiry Concerning the Indications of Insanity* (1830) and *The Treatment of the Insane without Mechanical Restraints* (1856) and Barlow's *On Man's Power over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity* (1849).

¹⁶⁰ Bourne Taylor very briefly makes a similar point when she notes that "the process by which [Laura's] identity is restored can never take the form of the complete exploration of her memory, since this itself would upset the moral treatment of her cure, through which distressing associations are laid to rest" (128).

make you mad, then it might be preferable to remain in a state of stupefied oblivion.¹⁶¹

Yet in avoiding this pain, Laura loses her conscious will, the faculty Victorians believed differentiated humans from the lower animals, who were fully subject to automatic bodily processes. Like Manette, who is described as animalistic and childlike when he slips into shoemaking trances, Laura's trance state robs her of self-determination and will power, those key qualities that *bildungsroman* protagonists like David Copperfield gain over their "mistaken impulse[s]" and "undisciplined heart[s]" (644). Laura's compulsive behaviour instead resembles that delineated in a case study by Carpenter, the Victorian physiologist from whose work Collins quotes in his later novel, *The Moonstone*. In Carpenter's discussion of the "nature of a purely sensorial and instinctive, as distinguished from an intelligent existence" (667–68), he relates the story of a young girl who slips into a trance after almost drowning. Afterwards, she can remember nothing and behaves like an automaton. She slowly gains an interest in crafts; she begins by picking at bedclothes, and then progresses to picking apart flowers, cutting and pasting paper shapes, and then onto patchwork and worsted work. "She gradually began, like a child, to register ideas and acquire experience ... in connexion with her manual occupation" (669). Similarly, Walter buys Laura a set of watercolours and a sketchbook and tries to engage her in scrapbook

¹⁶¹ Jonathan Miller has argued that the Victorian unconscious, as articulated by William Hamilton and William Carpenter, was "productive" rather than "custodial" (28): "Its contents are inaccessible not, as in psychoanalytic theory, because they are held as in strenuously preventive detention but, more interestingly, because the effective implementation of cognition and conduct does not actually *require* comprehensive awareness" (29). *The Woman in White*, however, comes close to formulating something like a protective unconscious, since Laura's memories are hived off because they are so dangerous to her sanity.

making to “[help] her mind slowly by this simple means” (444). The girl in the case is “roused” by visits from a young man whom she loved before her accident (669), just like Laura, who forgets almost everything except for Marian and her beloved Walter. Walter reignites Laura’s happy memories of their past “by showing her the sketch of the summerhouse” (443) where they spent time together. And although the woman in the above case is unconscious of her past, including her near drowning, when “she was shown a landscape in which there was a river, or the view of a troubled sea, she became intensely excited and violently agitated” (669). Likewise, at the slightest reference to her abduction, Laura “changed and trembled still; her words became confused; her memory wandered and lost itself” (570). Eventually the injured woman in the case snaps out of what Carpenter regards as an essentially animal existence. She regains her memory and most of her faculties, “as if awakening from a sleep of twelve months’ duration” (670). On the other hand, Laura slowly awakens to most of the memories of her past life and emerges from the worst aspects of her dependence, but her painful memories remain asleep. Laura never achieves a unified identity, nor does she gain full mastery over this dissociated and animalistic part of her self.

iv. Tracing the Past: Associationism and the Inscribable Mind

Collins exploits similar tensions between memory and forgetfulness and automatic and volitional behaviour through the novel’s allusions to Lockean metaphors of the inscribable mind and to the related doctrine of Associationism, a theory of cognition that dominated late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British

psychological discourse.¹⁶² As Kearns argues, “readers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries thought of perception as consisting of a passive mind being impressed by stimuli from the external world” (34). In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke claims that the mind is inscribed by experience, as “white paper receives any characters” (35). He denies that there are “any innate ideas in the mind before impression from sensation or reflection” (47). The word “impression” was at this point synonymous with “imprint” or “edition”. It therefore links the effect of experience to the action of a printing press, evoking an image of white paper receiving characters in order to describe mental activity. David Hume similarly conceives of the human mind as impressible or imprintable material. He differentiates between thoughts and “impressions” in terms of “the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness” (*Complete Works* 49). The word “impression” has become so naturalized as a metaphor for the effect of perception that its connection to printing and the implication that the mind is imprinted utterly by external agents may not be immediately recognizable today, but eighteenth-century texts make this philosophical and psychological orientation explicit.

Consistent with this view was the Associationist doctrine articulated in part by Locke, Hume, and Thomas Hobbes and further refined by David Hartley in his influential work *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and his Expectations* (1749). As I explained in Chapter 3, Associationist doctrine was an

¹⁶² For instance, Associationist tenets were central to the work of Sir William Hamilton, James and John Stuart Mill, and Alexander Bain.

attempt to articulate the process whereby sensory impressions became thoughts, which then automatically provoked new and related thoughts. Hartley argues that thoughts follow one another in consciousness based upon previous impressions and associations. The more times someone has a thought or sensory impression, the deeper the inscription on the mind, and the more habitual one's thoughts and reactions become: "if a single sensation can leave a perceptible effect, trace, or vestige, for a short time, a sufficient repetition of a sensation may leave a perceptible effect of the same kind, but of a more permanent nature" (36).

Following this logic, Victorian psychologists suggested that it would be wise to avoid painful memories, since thinking or talking about experiences would retrace them on the brain, making the associated feelings more and more habitual.

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discussions of such mental inscriptions, the words "impression" and "trace" are used frequently and function as signs of Associationist influence. Although Hartley conceives of cognition in terms of vibrations in the nerves and brain, he refers repeatedly to the "traces"¹⁶³ and "impressions"¹⁶⁴ left by sensory input, thus participating in the Lockean tradition of figuring experience as marks on the mind. Following Locke, Hartley also uses the verb "trace" to discuss how one can observe the workings of one's own mind. Locke claims that "If we will *trace* the progress of our minds, and with

¹⁶³ For those instances in which Hartley uses the word "trace" to refer to the effect of experience on the mind or to the attempt to understand, or "trace" the effects of experience, see pages 2, 37, 45, 50, 91, 92, 103, 143, 171, 231, 235, 243, 262, 270, 300, 303, 310, 340, 456, and 466.

¹⁶⁴ For the use of the word "impress" to refer to the effect of experience on the senses or brain, see pages 8, 21, 38, 40, 75, 87, 89, 93, 97, 113, 117, 142, 144, 171, 341, 342, 349, 510, and 511. For "impression," see pages xii, xiii, 20, 23, 25, 36, 37, 39, 44, 45, 47, 48, 61, 65, 66, 67, 76, 77, 79, 82, 88, 89, 92, 93, 103, 106, 107, 114, 115, 117, 124, 130, 131, 135, 147, 148, 149, 156, 169, 173, 235, 236, 238, 241, 242, 247, 255, 259, 518, and 548.

attention observe how it repeats, adds together, and unites its simple ideas received from sensation or reflection, it will lead us farther than at first perhaps we should have imagined” (98, emphasis mine). Locke conceives of thinking as a journey: one thought follows another thought, each making an impression that can later be traced to understand cognition. Hartley considers the effect of experience in similar terms. He notes, “Every person may find, that his taste ... receives considerable changes in his progress through life; and may, by careful observation, *trace up* these changes to the associations that have caused them” (270, emphasis mine). Experience is like a walk through life, and the source of change can be understood by retracing one’s steps, going back mentally over one’s experiences.

In the nineteenth century, Hamilton complicates this image of mental activity as a path, instead representing the mind as a series of roads, traversed by “the rapid ... movement of thought, which ... passes from one order of subjects to another, only to return again to the first; which advances, retrogrades, deviates, and reverts, sometimes marking all the points on its route, again clearing, as if in play, immense intervals” (2: 251). In *Elements of Psychology* (1853), John D. Morell also represents mental activity in terms of a network of roads:

When any appropriate stimulus makes an impression upon the corresponding nerve . . . the first tendency is for that impression to follow the pathway of the nerve or nerves affected . . . up to the cerebrum itself . . . [T]he impulse impressed passes all the various stations on the road, speeds on to its destination, gives an intelligent hint to the mind there located, and then elicits a

response (97)

Although Hamilton and Morell continue to rely on Associationist tenets (a reliance that Morell signals through his use of the word “impression”), both thinkers adapt Locke’s image of mental activity as a path to conceive of the complexity and semi-conscious dimensions of mental experience.

Collins obsessively repeats the words “impression” and “trace” throughout *The Woman in White*, similarly drawing upon and expanding contemporary metaphors for the inscribable nature and associative processes of the mind. What is striking about his frequent use of the words “impression” and “impress” (over 60 times in a 600 page novel) is the way their repetition emphasizes the powerlessness of the characters in the face of the overwhelming effect of experience on their thoughts and feelings. This Lockean model of the human mind as a product of external stimuli was compatible with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century assumptions about the permeable nature of identity. While Associationist theories continued to shape Victorian psychology, the conception of the mind as an impressible entity, completely vulnerable to external manipulation, challenges the nineteenth-century novelistic valuation of self-determination and inwardness, as well as more widespread assumptions about innate personality and bounded identity. Dames has argued that Victorian psychology relied upon Associationist doctrine while modifying it to reflect the Victorian emphasis on psychological coherence: “It is interested . . . in codifying the rules of Associationism, firming them up, so to speak in order to produce a rigidly bounded and internally consistent psychic sense of self” (Dames 131). In *The Woman in White*, characters do not have this protected inner space, and their identities are not separable from

the outside world. This permeability is not, however, presented as a healthy and natural state, as it might be in an eighteenth-century text written during what Wahrman calls the “*ancien régime* of identity” of identity. Instead, these external impressions are understood as traumatic violations, disrupting the boundaries of identity and destroying self-determination.

Over and over again in the novel, characters are impressed by stimuli that direct their cognition in dangerous ways. For instance, before Walter meets Anne Catherick, his “mind remain[s] passively open to the impressions produced by the view” (19) and, consequently, he is struck forcibly (and later haunted) by his impression of her. After being similarly struck by his strong impression of Laura, Walter’s mind automatically progresses along what seem like irrational associative chains of suggestion: “Mingling with the vivid impression produced by the charm of her fair face and head, her sweet expression, and her winning simplicity of manner, was another impression, which, in a shadowy way, suggested to me the idea of something wanting” (50). This shadowy impression is of course Walter’s experience with Laura’s double, Anne, and it has been recalled according to the Laws of Association, in particular, the law of similarity.¹⁶⁵ Once Marian points out the similarity of Laura and Anne, Walter admits, “I see it—more unwillingly than I can say. To associate that forlorn, friendless, lost woman, even by an accidental likeness only, with Miss Fairlie, seems like casting a shadow on the future of the bright creature who stands looking at us now” (61). He then worries about reinforcing this association through repetition, exclaiming,

¹⁶⁵ Pykett and Bourne Taylor also link Walter’s thought processes in these two scenes to Associationist doctrine (Pykett 179-80, Bourne Taylor 117).

“Let me lose the impression again as soon as possible” (61). Similarly, Marian explains her powerful reaction to Count Fosco in terms of associative connections. She notes that his “striking resemblance” to Napoleon “certainly impressed me, to begin with; but there is something in him besides the resemblance, which has impressed me more” (221). Fosco is, at this point, attempting to exert mesmeric control over everyone around him. The repetition of the word “impressed” therefore ominously underscores the degree to which human feeling and thought can be shaped, directed, and controlled by external experiences that violate the boundaries of self-determining selfhood.

However, it is the word “trace” that is most clearly relevant to Collins’s depiction of the effects of traumatic experience on a spatialized model of identity. Collins uses “trace” to describe the search for or absence of someone, who must then be “traced”; the bodily “traces” of mental pain; the process of self-examination, or of “tracing out” one’s thoughts and experiences; and the act of physically “retracing” one’s steps in a physical landscape. The novel links all of these seemingly disconnected experiences together in an associative chain. It represents cognitive processes through an image pattern that combines the Lockean handwriting and path metaphors with Hamilton’s and Morell’s image of the road network. This image pattern evokes the overwhelming effect of painful experiences and insinuates both the desirability and danger of remembering and narrating them.

Collins uses the word “trace” most conspicuously in connection with the absence of someone, as characters constantly flee and hide from one another, while others track down, chase, and try to lock them away. After his first meeting

with Anne, Walter wonders if she has been “traced and captured by the men in the chaise” (29). Later, when she and her companion disappear, Mr. Gilmore arranges for “the tracing of the two women” (118). Before Walter leaves Limmeridge, he notes wistfully: “Wind and wave had long since smoothed out the trace of her which she had left in those marks on the sand” (117-8). Before Laura is taken from Blackwater Park, Marian searches for her and is relieved to find “traces of her ... in footsteps on the sand” (295). After Laura’s escape from the asylum, Marian is content to take her to London, where “all traces” of them can be “effaced” (II). Upon hearing of Pesca’s involvement with a dangerous Italian secret society, Walter notes that “cases recurred to my memory ... of foreigners found stabbed in the streets, whose assassins could never be traced” (595). This statement foreshadows Fosco’s demise at the hands of the society he has betrayed: “The hand that struck him was never traced” (640).

In addition to this physical tracing of characters, the word “trace” also refers to the search for an idea. Marian, for instance, is unable to “trace” the “source” of her suspicion that something will prevent the marriage between Laura and Percival (195). The verbal link that Collins establishes between characters physically searching the English countryside and mentally searching consciousness recalls both Locke’s image of mental activity as a path and Hamilton’s depiction of cognition as travel along a network of roads. The characters’ constant chasing after one another represents the attempt to analyse memories and unconscious mental processes. Since Anne possesses a memory that Percival wants locked away and that Walter wants examined, her escape, flight, and capture are clearly symbolic. And since the most important absence in

the novel is Laura's lost memory, Walter's physical searching replaces the psychological searching that Laura is unable to do. Even though Laura is found, Anne's death and the inability of the authorities to trace Fosco's assassins parallel Walter and Laura's failure to retrieve Laura's memory of her traumatic wounding.

The novel also uses the word "trace" to evoke the way painful experiences can inscribe themselves upon the body. In an article on "The physiognomy of insanity," John Conolly notes that in the ill or insane, "the lineaments of disease are imprinted in the face" (3). Similarly, characters in the novel frequently read the signs of suffering "traced" on bodies. Before Laura's marriage to Percival, Marian sees "the traces of tears [that] glistened between her eyelids" (196). The asylum director echoes Conolly when he notes that, in madness, "change[s] from better to worse ... produce alterations of appearance externally" (428). Even when Laura recovers her appearance, her mind is still marked: "Here, and here only, the traces of the past lay deep—too deep to be effaced" (570). Fosco's shock at seeing Pesca at the opera, by contrast, leaves a more temporary, but still quite visible mark. Walter claims that Fosco's "face still betrayed plain traces of the shock that had overwhelmed him at the Opera" (600). Although the novel is most concerned with psychological wounds, what Fosco calls a "lacerat[ion]" of the "sensibilities" (457), Collins uses the word "trace" to connect them to the visible scars that mark his characters. Fosco's body is a palimpsest, scarred by the mark of the Italian secret society that he joins and cannot elude. Then, when he is murdered by this society for betrayal, this physical mark is disguised by another wound: "No other traces of violence appeared about the body, except on the left arm; and there ... were two deep cuts in the shape of the letter *T*, which entirely obliterated the mark

of the Brotherhood” (640). The mark of the brotherhood, and then the *T* that replaces it, signify his membership in and betrayal of the group, but the precise circumstances of his death remain a mystery. Likewise, Laura’s appearance demonstrates that she has suffered but provides no clue to the events she has forgotten.

These layers of emotional and physical scarring create an image of the wounded mind and body as palimpsestic texts. In *Suspiria de Profundis*, Thomas De Quincey explains the unconscious dynamics of memory by transforming Locke’s image of the mind as white paper into a palimpsest: “What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain?” (233).¹⁶⁶ He describes the process by which medieval monks erased manuscripts in order to make way for new writing—“They expelled the writing sufficiently to leave a field for the new manuscript, and yet not sufficiently to make the traces of the elder manuscript irrecoverable for us” (228)—and then uses this process as a metaphor for the act of remembering and forgetting:

countless are the mysterious hand-writings of grief or joy which have inscribed themselves successively upon the palimpsest of your brain; and, like the annual leaves of aboriginal forests, or the undissolving snows on the Himalaya, or light falling upon light, the endless strata have covered up each other in forgetfulness. But by the hour of death, but by fever, but by the searchings of opium,

¹⁶⁶ De Quincey considered *Suspiria de Profundis* as a sequel to *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, with which Collins was certainly familiar. In *The Moonstone*, Ezra Jennings quotes from “the far-famed” *Confessions* while explaining the effects of opium and the workings of the unconscious mind (387).

all these can revive in strength. They are not dead, but sleeping.

(235)

By using the word “trace” to associate Laura’s psychological wound with Fosco’s physical scars, Collins thus figures Locke’s handwriting on the brain as an engraving in the flesh that leaves visible though mysterious scars.

The word “trace” is used in connection to handwriting as well, further emphasizing the figuration of painful experience as indelible and illegible writing on the mind. As Walter attempts to uncover Percival’s dark secrets, he consults a duplicate of Percival’s parents’ marriage register. Walter notes that “on the blank page at the beginning, to which I first turned, were traced some lines in faded ink. They contained these words—‘Copy of the Marriage Register’” (520). When Walter sees the gap where Percival’s parents’ marriage should be recorded, he realizes that Percival has effaced his illegitimate birth by palimpsestically overwriting the blank in the original marriage register. But as De Quincey remarks, “the deep, deep tragedies of infancy . . . remain lurking below all, and these lurk to the last” (235). One might “[expel] the writing sufficiently to leave a field for the new manuscript, and yet not sufficiently to make the traces of the elder manuscript irrecoverable for us” (De Quincey 228). The copy of the marriage register is like the imprint of experience on the mind; though painful memories are difficult to read, they can never be erased. Percival and the other characters in the novel have very little control over their own identities, because their experiences are indelibly, though mysteriously, inscribed on their psyches.

Though several characters in the novel write their own stories, they do not acquire control over the stories written into their bodies and minds. In the opening

section of the novel, Walter claims that he will “trace the course of one complete series of events” (1), thus linking his narration of events to the process of tracing and searching that uncovered them. The novel itself is a collection of characters’ memories of experiences, as they try to recapture the truth by repeating and copying out their stories, which are often repeated again in other narrations. This tracing, copying, and repeating echoes the way characters in the novel physically “retrace” their steps (75, 207, 439, 525, 581, 625), trying to get back to where they were. By implication, writing is a dangerous business. According to Associationist doctrine, recalling something you have been through means returning to the very same mental state. This process is presented positively when Walter writes about his early relationship with Laura: “My pen traces the old letters as my heart goes back to the old love. I write of her as Laura Fairlie still” (415). The connection Collins establishes between writing and memory is problematic, however, as the painful experiences inscribed upon the self cannot be read, rewritten, or traced out without psychological damage. Remembering the past means re-experiencing past emotional states, and the mental path becomes more deeply entrenched each time one goes back over it. When Walter tries to recount his first encounter with Anne, he unintentionally revives much later associated impressions that cloud his memory of this earlier event: “I trace these lines, self-distrustfully, with the shadows of after-events darkening the very paper I write on” (23). It is perhaps because of this “darkening,” the psychological danger inherent in revisiting the past, that the central mystery in the novel remains untraceable. Walter discovers Percival’s secret, and Walter traces with some precision the circumstances that led to Laura being locked away, but her

experiences in the asylum remain a mystery.

According to Freud, such an inability to assimilate traumatic experience leads to compulsive re-enactment. At first glance, *The Woman in White* seems more hopeful about the positive possibilities of forgetfulness. By the end of the novel, Laura has regained her name and cognitive abilities and has moved on to fulfil her socially appropriate role as wife and mother. Her final words to Walter indicate intelligence, humour, and an ability to look to the past without fear. As she attempts to tell Walter that they have inherited her ancestral home, she jokes that she “can only explain it by breaking through our rule, and referring to the past” (642). She is, however, abruptly interrupted by Marian’s insistence that “There is not the least necessity for doing anything of the kind We can be just as explicit, and much more interesting, by referring to the future” (643). In this protective statement, Marian betrays her belief in Laura’s continued fragility. In cutting off any possibility that Laura could make sense of the past in terms of its connection to the happy present, Marian prevents Laura from attaining the kind of agreement between past and present that Hamilton and Spencer find necessary for identity and consciousness. Like Dr. Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities*, who keeps his suffering secret because his traumatic story is incompatible with the domestic plot, Laura keeps her traumatic memories locked up inside her.

Despite the seemingly rosy ending, Walter’s repetitive retelling of the narrative does seem to anticipate Freud’s notion that unassimilated traumas are acted out in the repetition complex. Although Walter provides little information about Laura’s state of mind at the novel’s end, Walter has himself taken on the burden of searching for Laura’s lost memories, and therefore ends up taking on

the burden of their after effects. According to Malane, “Collins contrasts the lingering effects of mental disintegration for . . . women with Walter’s revitalized psychological strength” at the end of the novel (147), but the quoted evidence she provides of Walter’s “growing conviction” and “firmly strung” nerves (Collins 492) comes from about three quarters of the way through the novel. When he finishes the story, he admits, “the pen falters in my hand” (643). This phrase conveys his shaky rather than firm nerves, along with his lack of conviction that the story can ever be completed. Walter’s composition and compilation of the fragmented narrative happens after the final episode when he finds out about the inheritance. His reasons for undertaking this project remain unclear. Laura’s legal identity has been re-established, and they have given up on restoring her money. Walter writes the story using assumed names. What then, other than the compulsion to repeat, could motivate Walter to return to these horrifying experiences?

Yet however much the repetitive quality of Walter’s narrative seems to anticipate the repetition complex, it is perhaps more logical to understand it within the context of the novel’s web of Associationist allusions, as following directly from the Associationist claim that repeated cognitive experiences can become habitual and compulsive.¹⁶⁷ As in *A Tale of Two Cities*, narrating violence and

¹⁶⁷ What looks like an anticipation of Freudian doctrine is therefore more likely a fictionalized working out of the Associationist doctrine upon which Freud relied and to which he reacted in the formulation of his own theories. Freud’s debt to Associationist thought has frequently been noted. See, for instance, Valerie D. Greenberg’s claim in *Freud and His Aphasia Book* that Freud was “immersed in a tightly knit web of British associationist philosophy” (35). She argues that Freud drew extensively on both Hamilton’s and Spencer’s Associationist ideas, as interpreted by John Stuart Mill and H. Charlton Bastian (33–35). There are, of course, key differences between Associationist and Freudian understandings of repetition. While the

trauma perpetuates repetitive and damaging cognitive habits. In order to spare Laura the pain of going over her memories, Walter has taken on the task himself. Laura thus regains her identity and is free to create new associations and to heal—or so Walter and Marian hope. But Walter's articulation of these shocking events instead becomes habitual for him, thus leading to the production of the narrative, and to the darkness insinuated in the happy ending.

In a move that would become standard fare for the sensation novel, Collins provides a degree of resolution by mimicking the tidy ending of the marriage plot. Evil-doers are punished, leaving the virtuous free to establish domestic bliss. But the novel's final pages are nonetheless haunted by that which contemporary medicine and philosophy were not equipped to explain or cure. The *Woman in White* uses its wounded characters to juxtapose two competing contemporary visions of the self. On the one hand, it expresses a longing for the self-determining and socially integrated bourgeois subject that is articulated in the *bildungsroman* and posited as an ideal in much nineteenth-century philosophical and scientific discourse. On the other hand, its frequent references to medical and psychological writings about double consciousness and the inscribable mind emphasize the permeable, fragmented, and compulsive quality of psychic experience, particularly when characters are subjected to traumatic shocks. Moretti argues that the nineteenth-century *bildungsroman* eased the tensions of modernity by harmonizing freedom and happiness, individual and community, but

Associationists claimed that consciously revisiting painful experiences would induce repetitive and compulsive behaviour, Freud argued just the opposite, that refusing to remember or re-examine troubling experiences would cause repetitive acting out. See Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for an explication of the repetition complex and its connection to trauma.

Collins's heteroglossic shadow-*bildungsroman* instead suggests that such tensions are irreconcilable, that one cannot be a reflective and self-determining agent in an ideologically chaotic and abusive world. Both Laura and Walter seem to find a secure place in the social realm, but Laura's wounded self can never be integrated into it. And the novel's representation of the indelible scarring caused both by traumatic experience and its narration destroys any hope that the composition of the novel might free the characters from the horrors it reveals. The optimistic vision of the *bildungsroman*, its promise of a cohesive memory and healthy recovery from intense pain, is shadowed by *The Woman in White*'s horrifying suspicion of its impossibility.

This suspicion becomes more widespread over the course of the nineteenth century and Moretti has argued that the classical *Bildungsroman* loses its central place in English literature at the turn of the century, as theories of the unconscious begin to undermine the idea of unitary selfhood (234-7). He claims that this decline intensifies with the trauma of the First World War (229-45); the *bildungsroman* delineates the identity-shaping nature of experience but "in a trauma the external world proves too strong for the subject" (234). In representing the challenges that overwhelming and identity-splitting experiences pose to the bourgeois subject, *The Woman in White* thus functions as a *doppelgänger* of the *bildungsroman*, the ghostly double that foreshadows its demise.

AFTERWORD

Trauma and the Novel after 1860

This dissertation has traced the rise of the British trauma novel in the early- to mid-nineteenth century and argued that this form of novel emerged in the wake of the eighteenth-century problematization of suffering and rise of individual human rights doctrine. In the context of the new respect for personal integrity and the emergence of a new model of bounded individual identity, suffering was reconfigured as a shocking violation of natural and healthy human boundaries. The nineteenth-century British novel, involved as it was in the promotion of discrete individual selfhood, helped to create a culture that abjected suffering as incommensurate with identity. The novelistic tradition thus participated in the creation of the experience of trauma. British trauma novels react to the conventional novelistic promotion of bound interiority by exposing the challenge trauma poses to the character-building process. They draw on and critique the medical and literary discourses that promised to eradicate or cure psychological pain, demonstrating the impossibility of easy recovery. They also highlight the contradiction between bounded, coherent individualism and the vulnerable, fragmented quality of mental experience that medical science was beginning to explore.

I argued that *A Simple Story* reflects the conventional eighteenth-century depiction of suffering as central to human subjectivity, but that it also problematizes and ironizes this relationship. The suffering of economically powerless characters emphasizes the emotional permeability that, according to

contemporary medical discourse, characterized the weak. Their suffering thus guarantees them protection and identity within patriarchy, while any transgression of their role simply promotes further suffering, which once more emphasizes their permeability, need for protection, and identity. Inchbald ties subjectivity to emotional pain, but she does so in a satirical fashion, thereby participating in the widespread late-century problematization of suffering I discuss in my introduction.

In the nineteenth-century novels I examine in Chapters 2-4, suffering instead becomes traumatic: it challenges meaning-making systems and destroys the boundaries of individual identity. Yet Shelley's Romantic text *Matilda* rejects bounded individuation because this form of individuality acts as a buffer against intimacy. Matilda's traumatic breakdown and incestuous fixation on her father allow her to rip herself open to transgressive intimacy. The case study narrative Matilda writes therefore identifies both the allure and horror involved in a complete loss of boundaries.

In a similar vein, Dickens emphasizes the problematic dimension of both bounded bourgeois selfhood and its loss. Both middle- and working-class characters in *A Tale of Two Cities* are subject to the Associationist psychological forces that engrain violent habits, but it is bourgeois privacy in particular that creates the traumatic experience of unassimilable traumatic pain. Dickens nonetheless rejects the inter-subjective working class alternative because it leads to the externalization instead of internalization of violence. The novel ends by hinting at the possibility of entirely new forms of narrative and selfhood that would avoid both extremes.

For Collins, the boundaries of identity that are imposed by society, through marriage and the family in particular, are themselves traumatic and produce incurable psychic fragmentation. Collins's characters are completely vulnerable to the outside world, and the traumatic nature of constant external violation makes human experience compulsive and automatic. The novel thus negates the power of the human will and suggests that human boundaries are an illusion.

What emerges from my analysis of these novels is an account of early- to mid-nineteenth-century trauma novels as expressions of doubt about the life-plot articulated in the *bildungsroman* and domestic novel, genres that presented individual identity as something to be achieved by either sidelining or triumphantly overcoming psychological pain. These trauma novels imply not only that the bounded identity promoted by such novels can be destroyed by the traumatic violation of individual limits, but they also suggest that trauma is in fact a consequence of bounded individualism. *Matilda*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *The Woman in White* all express the compassion for human suffering and respect for the individual that characterized the new valuation of human life that arose at the turn of the nineteenth century, but they nonetheless question whether atomistic views of subjectivity, conceived spatially in terms of personal boundaries and domestic, penal, and institutional architecture, are the best protection against psychological pain.

But what changes occur in the 1860s to justify my ending this study with *The Woman in White*? My fourth chapter ends with a glance forward to the rise of psychoanalysis in the 1890s and to the decline of the *bildungsroman* in the wake

of the trauma of the First World War. I argued that Collins's depiction of the alienated quality of mental experience and his exploration of divided consciousness anticipates these important moments in the development of an explicit discourse of trauma at the beginning of the Modernist era. This afterword now shifts backward in time, returning us once more to the 1860s, in order to map the story of the buried origins of this trauma discourse and its connection to the late Victorian novel. The 1860s marked the beginning of a series of major shifts in Victorian culture, and while a broader study might track these changes in detail, this afterword instead sketches out some key cultural and literary developments in order to clarify why my study ends at this crucial turning point.

In flashing back to the 1860s, I'm making use of the kind of temporal disruption that dominates twentieth-century trauma narratives. As I emphasized in the introduction, my account of early nineteenth-century literary trauma as a primarily spatial phenomenon differs from modern theories of trauma that focus on distortions in time. This distinction may seem overly schematic: the movement of time is clearly important to the pre-1860 novels I examined in this dissertation (*A Tale of Two Cities*, in particular) and trauma continues today to be imagined in spatial terms as a violation of individual boundaries. Nonetheless, I have argued that the spatial model of trauma as a violation of individual integrity is the most consistent characteristic of the early- to mid-nineteenth-century trauma novel, while temporal structures gain more importance in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The foundation of the temporal account of trauma is the psychoanalytic concept of the repressed traumatic memory, formulated by Pierre Janet and

Sigmund Freud in the 1890s. Their theories, together with the post-war notion of shell shock and the modernist filmic technique of the flashback, were instrumental in the development of the temporal structure of twentieth-century literary and filmic trauma. Yet, before these key developments, from the 1860s to the turn of the twentieth century, British trauma novels focused less on the spatial architecture of identity and more on temporal patterning. To provide a few examples, Wilkie Collins's *Armada* (1866), Thomas Hardy's *Desperate Remedies* (1871), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901) all feature one or more serious incidents of nervous shock, and they all obsessively track the impingement of the past into the present. Increasingly in this period, the depiction of shocked and psychologically damaged characters is paired with the exploration of the return of the personal *and* ancestral past, and with issues of descent.

Even before this point, as I argue in Chapters 3 and 4, Collins and Dickens draw on scientific discourse to explore the way nervous shock could prompt regression to an instinctive, animalistic, or automatic state of being. After the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, this understanding of nervous shock takes on a new valence. In the decades after Darwin's book was published, trauma novels began to introduce elaborate patterns of repetition to represent the intrusion of the past into the present and the difficulty this intrusion poses to the idea of the self-determining, autonomous individual. Therefore, although trauma novels after 1860 continue to be concerned with the threat to individual identity, this threat begins to be imagined in temporal terms. Just as the horrors of the ancestral past may lie buried in one's physiology,

threatening to return in moments of atavistic regression, so too might the horrors of the personal past remain lodged in the animalistic unconscious, and return with a mysterious and violent power.

In their depiction of the effect of shock and trauma, many of these post-1860s novels make recourse to the spatial imagery that dominated early trauma novels, but transform it into a device for understanding the hold of the past on the present. Two brief examples will suffice. In *Dracula*, Stoker manipulates a well-known Gothic trope in Jonathan Harker's imprisonment in Dracula's castle, and this imprisonment also recalls the literal and metaphorical imprisonments of characters from the trauma novels I have examined in this study. Jonathan's traumatic loss of autonomy and the threat posed by vampiric boundary violation link the novel to earlier spatialized depictions of trauma as a violation of individual integrity. When Jonathan returns to London, he is weak and ill; like Laura Fairlie and Dr. Manette, he therefore tries to forget what he has seen. But Dracula's physical reappearance in London signals the return of the sexual and violent horror Jonathan is trying to forget. Despite the novel's use of a rhetoric of spatiality to depict trauma and its return, Dracula's move from his Transylvanian castle to the London streets is also a temporal movement from the feudal, medieval past into the bustling, modern present. Indeed, his hairy hands, long fingernails, and sexual and cannibalistic hunger make him a figure of atavistic regression to an earlier evolutionary stage.¹⁶⁸ Jonathan's traumatic imprisonment

¹⁶⁸ For critical discussions of *Dracula*'s manipulation of evolutionary discourses, see Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siecle: Identity and Empire*; Ernest Fontana, "Lombroso's *Criminal Man* and Stoker's *Dracula*;" and Daniel Pick, "'Terrors of the night': *Dracula* and 'Degeneration' in the Late Nineteenth Century."

threatened to place him in a position of animalistic submission to Dracula and to his own sexual instincts. Therefore, the return of his trauma is also, potentially, the atavistic return of a primal self.

A similar dynamic plays out in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Space plays an important role in this novel. Conan Doyle repeatedly links the moor to the Neolithic past and describes the Grimpen Mire as a kind of primordial sludge. Criminals hatch their plans and hide in these spaces, and Sherlock Holmes must examine these regions closely in order to discover what really happened to Sir Charles Baskerville. At the beginning of the novel, Sir Charles dies of shock, and shock also debilitates his nephew Henry at the end of the novel. Both are horrified at the sight of what they think is a ghostly hound, returning to take revenge on them for an attempted rape and murder perpetrated by their ancestor. The secrets of the past, and of the criminal who is responsible for intentionally shocking them, are found on the moor, in the space associated with primitive humanity. They discover that the hound is chained up on the moor, ready to be deployed as a psychologically traumatizing weapon by their cousin, a man who is the spitting image of (and atavistic throwback to) the rapist ancestor. Not all secrets are fully uncovered, however, as this cousin takes some with him when he falls into the mire in an attempted escape, swallowed by the primordial slime. These spatial images for buried traumatic knowledge thus stand in for a temporal schematic. The characters' return to the Neolithic moor and primordial mire runs alongside the novel's interest in discourses of atavism and degeneration.¹⁶⁹ Trauma novels

¹⁶⁹ For more on Doyle's use of the theories of degeneration and atavism, see Nils Claussøn,

written between the 1860s and the turn of the twentieth century thus link the temporal dimension of Victorian evolutionary science to the effects of shock and the structure of recurrent trauma.

Another key change that occurred in the 1860s and that affects the understanding of trauma concerns the receding scientific belief in a bounded, coherent self protected by the superintending will. Germ theory, which first gained widespread public acceptance in the 1860s, emphasized human permeability to infection and invasion from the outside world. Laura Otis links the rise of germ theory to the study of hypnotism, also newly reputable in the 1860s, which similarly emphasized human susceptibility to external invasion (6). Such research into hypnosis was an important precursor to the work of Janet and Freud. Arguably, so too was germ theory, which may lie behind the psychoanalytic understanding of buried trauma, described by Allan Young as a “parasitic,” “pathogenic” memory (29).¹⁷⁰ In the wake of germ theory and hypnosis research, human permeability begins to be seen as normal. While the contrary belief in a strong, centralized, coherent self as a bulwark against external influence still retains its allure, in the writings of S. Weir Mitchell for instance, it no longer dominates scientific views of the mind in the later nineteenth century.¹⁷¹ The

“Degeneration, ‘Fin-de-Siècle’ Gothic, and the Science of Detection: Arthur Conan Doyle’s ‘The Hound of the Baskervilles’ and the Emergence of the Modern Detective Story.” See also Lawrence Frank, “*The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the Man on the Tor, and a Metaphor for the Mind.” In the latter article, and in “Reading the Gravel Page: Lyell, Darwin, and Conan Doyle,” Frank links Doyle’s writing to evolutionary discourse and reads *The Hound*’s settings as symbolic of humanity’s evolutionary past.

¹⁷⁰ On the connections between germ theory and Freud’s understanding of trauma, see K. Codell Carter, “Germ theory, Hysteria, and Freud’s Early Work in Psychopathology” and Stephen Kern, *A Cultural History of Causality: Science, Murder Novels, and Systems of Thought*.

¹⁷¹ Otis argues that, for Mitchell, “healthy individuals . . . were people in whom a strong will

receding scientific belief in this kind of selfhood allows trauma, the failure and violation of bound, autonomous identity, to become a much more explicit object of study.

The 1860s witnessed other key changes to the culture of individualism in Britain. Early to mid-century trauma novels emphasize the vulnerability of the individual to the social world that was supposed to guarantee its integrity; in doing so, they anticipate the broader suspicion of discrete individualism that arose in the 1860s and that undergirds the more explicit medical models of nervous shock that emerged in the decades that followed. During the 1860s and 1870s, increased government regulation and oversight of business practices signaled a rising belief in collective action to protect against what had previously been considered individual problems and risks.¹⁷² To provide just a few examples, in the late 1850s, the Medical Registration Act standardized medical qualifications; in the 1860s, the Factory Acts were expanded to regulate workplace conditions in all industries; and in the 1860s and 70s, numerous laws were passed to prevent the adulteration of foodstuffs.

Roger Cooter has noted that, during this same period, a variety of new forms of insurance also proliferated, thereby allowing individuals to share the risks posed by unexpected damage to property and life.¹⁷³ He traces the growing

carefully controlled irrational drives” (38). Otis’s analysis suggests that while boundary invasion continued to remain a British literary and scientific obsession in the late nineteenth-century, developments in germ theory and hypnotism rendered such invasion a daily, consistent concern, rather than an exceptional traumatic horror.

¹⁷² For more on the rise of collectivism in the 1860s and 1870s, see Perkin’s *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* and A.V. Dicey’s *Lectures on the Relation Between Law and Public Opinion in England During the Nineteenth Century*.

¹⁷³ As Cooter points out, the first accident insurance was introduced in 1848 in order to

collective actions that began to be taken to protect against and respond to accidents, through safety measures and first aid training. According to Cooter, unexpected accidents were transformed, at this point, from “more or less *private* (individualized) happenings to more or less *public* ones, affecting or concerning the whole of society” (121). It is unsurprising, then, that insurance claims began in the 1860s and 1870s to be lodged against railway companies for mental injury arising from train accidents. The explicit medical model of nervous shock that is the precursor of the modern discourse of trauma arose through the testimony of physicians in various court cases on this issue. The tension between bound individual identity and the risks to that identity from the social structures that should protect it thus became an explicit topic of debate at this point. Jill Matus’s astute observation that Victorian novels of trauma are characterized by their emphasis on questions of guilt and responsibility applies specifically to this context and to the mid- to late-nineteenth-century period on which she focuses. In contrast, my study of early- to mid-century trauma novels offers an account of the novelistic exploration of bounded subjectivity, and of its violation, before it became a topic of widespread and explicit public conversation.

The context for understanding, experiencing, and representing trauma thus changed dramatically in the 1860s. The question with which this dissertation closes is whether this study of early- to mid-nineteenth-century trauma novels can have any implications for current understandings and representations of trauma.

protect railway passengers (115). Although it floundered initially, accident insurance proliferated over the following decades (115-6). Such policies served a function for the middle and upper classes that was served for the working classes by the Friendly societies (115). According to Perkin, these “friendly societies for mutual insurance against sickness and death” also grew drastically at this point, “from 9,672 in 1803 with 704, 350 members . . . to over 32,000 societies in 1872 with over four million members (119).

Though I have insisted throughout this study on the necessity of distinguishing between modern and nineteenth-century understandings of suffering, my findings may provide some perspective on our contemporary assumptions about trauma. Though much has changed since the mid-nineteenth century, we do resemble the Romantics and early Victorians in being torn between competing models of selfhood that inflect our attitudes to violence and suffering.

On the one hand, we continue to be invested in the post-Enlightenment culture of individualism that assumes coherent and bound selfhood to be the standard and normative state. We believe in human rights and in the integrity of the person and see intense human suffering as an unacceptable threat to healthy identity. Popular novels, movies, and television series, such as *Dexter* and *The United States of Tara*, trace all pathology, violence, and identity fragmentation to formative traumatic experiences. We are so invested in the idea that suffering is a traumatic challenge to selfhood that we use the term “trauma” to describe more and more varieties of painful experience, including difficulties in childbirth, academic struggles, or the loss of a job.

On the other hand, we also inhabit a post-humanist, post-individualist world that de-centres individual consciousness and sees the erasure of individual boundaries as a societal advance. Social networking, the continuous presence of cell phones and texting, and the anonymous co-creation of knowledge on the Internet have eroded the boundaries of personal privacy, individual identity, and intellectual ownership. Such virtual boundary transgression is in many ways quite liberating. The Internet connects people across national, linguistic, and cultural borders, promotes mass political movements like the Arab Spring, and provides

opportunities for joint creative endeavours. “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall” – the opening line of Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall” is a bizarrely apt descriptor of the online age.

Yet, despite the clear benefits of this openness, our boundary-crossing culture is also increasingly drawn to the spectacle of violence. Our films and videogames stage dehumanizing violence as spectacle, resurrecting in virtual form the public executions and bearbaiting that characterized pre-Enlightenment society. Stieg Larsson’s wildly popular *Millenium Trilogy* of novels, and the hit Swedish and American filmic adaptations of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, are obsessed with repetitive spectacles of violent revenge, enacted in retaliation for psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Such contemporary versions of the early modern revenge tragedies may signal a return, at least in the artistic realm, to a culture of externalized violence instead of internalized trauma as a response to suffering and victimization. Our culture is particularly desensitized to the violation of boundaries when it occurs online. A Civics teacher in Montreal recently showed his grade ten students the online video of Luka Magnotta murdering and dismembering Jun Lin, after they voted 22-3 to watch it together in class (Sidhartha). Although this is an isolated and extreme example, and the teacher was quickly fired, online anonymity does afford people a platform to insult, defame, threaten, and humiliate one another, transgressing the boundaries of mutual respect they would not cross in everyday life. The borders of the “*homo clausus*” are eroding, often for the better, but “Good fences make good neighbours,” as Frost’s curmudgeonly neighbour might also remind us (line 26).

Like our nineteenth-century forebears and the modernists after them, we continue to be caught between the model of bounded individualism that protects against suffering at the cost of transforming it into unassimilable trauma, and the complete erasure of boundaries that can make violence acceptable. The novels this dissertation examines reminded their nineteenth-century readers of the necessity of moving beyond the “self in a case” model of subjectivity while nonetheless maintaining compassionate respect for individual human life. Despite the major historical and literary changes that have occurred since 1860, we continue to face a similar dilemma today.

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