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Bad Writing: Responses to Early Gothic Fiction and the Cultivation of Emotional Taste

DISSERTATION

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

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Dissertation Committee:
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DEDICATION

In memory of my mother, who cared about emotions above all else, accepted difference, and always strove for understanding.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Bad Writing: Responses to Early Gothic Fiction and the Cultivation of Emotional Taste

By

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"Bad Writing: Responses to Early Gothic Fiction and the Cultivation of Emotional Taste" analyzes portrayals of emotion in early gothic fiction, using the particular features of these portrayals to explain variations in reception. Focusing on eighteenth-century British gothic works that have been harshly criticized either in their day or in ours, I discuss Eliza Parsons's *Castle of Wolfenbach*, Matthew Lewis's *Monk*, Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, and Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, novels whose tumultuous reception histories especially beg questions about how and why readers judge and feel differently about literature. For instance, early reviewers of *Udolpho* express sorrow and terror in response to what they describe as the novel's well-wrought scenes, but a recent Goodreads reviewer writes that she would like to slap its heroine. I consider these kinds of responses to be a function of what I call "emotional taste," and I propose explanations for differences in emotional taste by closely analyzing how the novels construct affective experiences using tools with variable associations. In doing so, I attend to the way formal, linguistic, and mechanical features gain or lose emotional relevance depending on a reader's historical

positioning and attitude toward the text. I argue that because the craft of gothic fiction carries complex histories of emotional relation within and beyond the text, when critics judge the writing of these novels as good or bad, their judgments reveal less about the quality of the writing and more about the affective norms of literary and critical expression that inform the judgment. In turn, when critics argue that certain kinds of reading are good or bad, they draw attention to the ways these affective norms are in flux. Using a broad range of responses from professional and amateur critics, I demonstrate how the emotional rhetoric and conventions of diverse critiques, when put in conversation with the details of the text, can offer new perspectives on the novels and on the practices of literary criticism themselves.

INTRODUCTION

> There is a sense in which modern culture may *be* the interminable struggle around where and how to draw the boundary line between good and bad reading and writing.
> —William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*

The eighteenth-century British gothic novels that readers take up today often have tumultuous reception histories, and ones I analyze in my dissertation, dating from 1764 to 1796, especially beg questions about how and why readers judge and feel differently about literature. My dissertation considers how these early gothic novels portray and invite feeling and how these portrayals and invitations produce startlingly different critical responses. For instance, early reviewers of Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) write that "the emotions of love, pity, grief, and anguish, are described with inimitable delicacy" and that its mysteries "do indeed *harrow up the soul*," but a recent Goodreads review describes the novel as "a 'slapping the heroine' kind of funny."[1] I will propose explanations for divergent responses like these by closely analyzing how the novels construct emotional experiences using tools that gain or lose emotional relevance depending on a reader's historical positioning and attitude toward the text. In doing so, I will pay special attention to the variable affective associations of formal, linguistic, and mechanical features—in the case of *Udolpho*, the way that Radcliffe's use of the word *sweet* conveys a feminized emotional permeability that was pleasing in her time but can seem sickly in ours.

[1] Review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe, *The Analytical Review* 19 (June 1794), 144, Google Books; review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe, *The British Critic: And Quarterly Theological Review* 4 (summer 1794), 111, Google Books; Sara Giacalone, review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe, Goodreads, January 14, 2003, https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/506830572/.

Gothic novels have proven to be particularly appropriate for this study of so-called bad writing. Though early critics judged *Udolpho* (and a handful of other gothics) to be exemplary, they excoriated and mocked most novels of its kind, and even today many scholars treat the vast majority of gothic novels as mere historical ephemera—cheaply printed books that once provided undiscerning readers with excessive and derivative stories of no literary value. All of the novels in this dissertation have been labeled bad at some point by some group of readers, but the justifications for this label invite questions that I attempt to answer through detailed analysis of the texts and their criticism. I argue that because the craft of gothic fiction carries complex histories of emotional relation within and beyond the text, when critics judge the writing of these novels as good or bad, their judgments reveal less about the quality of the writing and more about the affective norms of literary and critical expression that inform the judgment. In turn, when critics argue that certain kinds of reading are good or bad, they draw attention to the ways these affective norms are in flux.

Despite differences in norms, there are some notable similarities between the transitional moment of criticism in the latter half of the eighteenth century and our own moment of scholarly transition. In the era in which the novels I analyze were written, critics established their importance as guardians of the public's taste, emotions, and morals amid the perceived cultural threat of the growth of the print medium, which democratized reading and increased the publication and circulation of novels. Today, professional literary critics are similarly called upon to redefine their role as they resist or adapt to unprecedented access to information, rapid cultural change, and the devaluation of the discipline, including the incursion of amateur book review sites that allow lay readers to

disseminate their own judgments of works. These online reviews play a crucial role in my dissertation, as I use them alongside recent scholarly studies and older responses to demonstrate how the emotional rhetoric and conventions of diverse critiques, when put in conversation with the details of the texts, can enhance scholarly understanding of the novels and the changing practices and investments of literary criticism itself.

I begin by analyzing Eliza Parsons's *Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793), a novel that Jane Austen enshrined as "horrid" and one that both portrays and acts as a school for emotional interaction—a school that teaches habits of emotional judgment similar to those of recent criticism, though espousing different values. In my second chapter, I consider how the sensational style of *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis's (1796) evokes uncomfortably mixed responses due to critical strictures and explore options for working beyond the current scholarly methods for writing about scandalous fiction. Next, I advance a method for identifying changes in what I call "emotional taste" in responses to Radcliffe's *Udolpho*. In the final chapter, I examine how Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764) creates tonal ambiguity through dialogue, analyzing responses to this ambiguity in light of the development of the Camp and seeking other ways to hold open its emotional contrasts and indeterminacies. Rather than ordering my chapters chronologically, I proceed from analyzing large-scale compositional features to examining minute ones, beginning with Parsons's sentimental, formulaic conventions and abstracted style and Lewis's contrasting sensational conventions and direct style; moving to Radcliffe's use of a single repeated word; and ending with Walpole's punctuation, the smallest unit of composition that can hold emotional associations.

A key interlocutor for my dissertation is Elizabeth Napier, whose study *The Failure of Gothic* is a touchstone for the considerations of gothic emotion that followed. Napier argues that the formal and emotional ways gothic novels "fail" reveal how the genre was pushing up against representational limitations that would be resolved by Romantic forms. Prefacing her argument with a review of the critical history of the genre from her vantage point of 1987, Napier notes that gothic fiction "was seldom complimented by its contemporary critics" and even until the 1960s, "evaluations of Gothic fiction tended to be damaging, often in the extreme."[2] After this turning point, she describes "a tradition of criticism of Gothic that is radically bifurcated—especially on questions of quality."[3] Napier writes, "It is my intention in this study to suggest that the imprecision and extremes to which the Gothic has been subjected to critically are in part a result of instability and cross-purposes in the form itself."[4] I find myself prompted to reassess the same novels she analyzes in light of their criticism and, like her, to seek explanations for this criticism in the writing of the novels themselves. As I revisit her argument three decades later, I see that the proliferation of gothic scholarship in the 1990s and 2000s validated the genre with crucial explorations of its historical and literary contexts, portrayals of women and foreigners, and philosophical and political engagements, among many other considerations. Maggie Kilgour reflects on many of these scholarly treatments, as well as Napier's, in arguing that gothic form, "a Frankenstein's monster," inspires a critical tendency toward "dismemberment" in a focus on conventions, deconstructive readings of its critiques of

[2] Elizabeth R. Napier, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 2.
[3] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 3.
[4] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 4.

modernity, and an overall hermeneutical ambivalence.[5] I see a similar ambivalence in the emotion of criticism of the gothic, which, while rooted in gothic form, also speaks to the associations of particular writing techniques that precede and postdate the early British gothic era. Enabled by the work of scholars in emotion and reception studies, especially, I will argue that the important task is to examine not how gothic writing fails, but how we as critics judge it to fail or succeed, and that it is actually Napier and many other scholars who are pushing up against the limits of conventions for scholarly treatments of fictional emotion.

In this study, I use different affective terms depending on whether I am focusing more on literary conventions (*sentiment*, *sensation*, *sensibility*), critical judgments that include low-intensity feelings (*affect*, *attitude*), or novelistic portrayals of physicality (*sensation*, *feeling*). Most often, though, I prefer the common term *emotion*, a word that foregrounds action. In contrast to a psychological conception of emotion as solely personal, rhetorician Laura Micciche writes that emotions are "performative" because they are "acted and embodied in the social world."[6] Emotion is not easily separated into its imaginative, affective, and embodied components, nor do these personal feelings exist apart from the larger situations that enable them, as Lauren Berlant's work on public affect and Daniel Gross's work on the rhetoric of emotion have shown. For instance, Gross writes, "The contours of our emotional world have been shaped by institutions such as slavery and poverty that simply afford some people greater emotional range than others, as they are shaped by publicity [like the coverage of Princess Diana's death] that has nothing to do

[5] Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 4-5.
[6] Laura R. Micciche, *Doing Emotion: Rhetoric, Writing, Teaching* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 2007), 1.

with the inherent value of each human life and everything to do with technologies of social recognition and blindness."[7] Theorist Sara Ahmed explains the complexity of the way emotions are experienced and made available, writing that "emotions are what move us, and how we are moved involves interpretations of sensations and feelings not only in the sense that we interpret what we feel, but also in the sense that what we feel might be dependent on past interpretations that are not necessarily made by us, but that come before us."[8] In this way, emotions are "mediated rather than immediate."[9] Ahmed's concept of "stickiness" is a useful way to think about how this works specifically: "The sign is a 'sticky sign' as an effect of a history of articulation, which allows the sign to accumulate value . . . To use a sticky sign is to evoke other words, which have become intrinsic to the sign through past forms of association."[10] This occurs not only with words, Ahmed adds, but with bodies to which disgust "sticks." For instance, in the case of gothic fiction, many scholars have argued that the genre's association with women and people of low socioeconomic status has played a role in its stigma, and I have discovered that a comparable stigma clings to features as minor as the exclamation points that gothic works utilize. In my dissertation, I attempt to elucidate the emotional associations of words, grammatical and mechanical features, and literary conventions in order to help explain critical responses. I also seek to understand the emotions that are made available to critics in particular situations and the way those emotions are performed socially, which further shape the emotional landscape in which we read and write.

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[7] Daniel M. Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's* Rhetoric *to Modern Brain Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 4.
[8] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004; 2015), 171.
[9] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 171.
[10] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 92.

Critical Emotion

More and more scholars have turned their attention to the origins of current literary critical practices and the feelings that these practices involve.[11] I will discuss eighteenth-century attitudes toward emotions and literature more shortly, as a background to the reception of the gothic novel, but here I would like to note some literary historical studies that especially speak to the shared emotional investments of the reading cultures of the eighteenth century and the present day. Trevor Ross describes the early formation of the British literary canon as an act of anxious protection of a literary tradition and the proper appreciation of it.[12] He writes that by the eighteenth century, the project of elevating aesthetic productions involved abstracting them from worldly issues of commerce and politics: "Aesthetic value became a matter of felt-experiences within the consumer's deeply embedded moral sense, of meanings perceived by the reader's intuitive judgment, and of the shocks and terrors of the sublime upon the viewer's sensibility."[13] Denise Gigante offers a complementary history by demonstrating how the development of the metaphor of aesthetic taste allowed for the idea of exalted literary pleasure to remain locked in symbolic struggle with the more immoderate, physicalized appetite of consumption.[14]

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[11] In addition to the ones I discuss below, some notable recent contributions to this investigation come from Fredric Bogel, who validates the eroticized obsession of close reading; Steven Goldsmith, who describes critical enthusiasm; and Sianne Ngai, who discusses the noncommittal affect of critical interest. See Fredric V. Bogel, *New Formalist Criticism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Steven Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitation: Criticism and the Emotions* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); and Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[12] Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 61.

[13] Ross, *English Literary Canon*, 189.

[14] Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

Though these distinctions have broken down somewhat, recent arguments about critical detachment show that they remain relevant.

Addressing the history of literary scholarship, Jonathan Kramnick summarizes the state of literary criticism in the eighteenth century as a conflict between public-minded journalists and gatekeeping academics. He views the condition of our contemporary discipline as the inheritance of this debate, which produces a "vexed desire" in its divergent impulses toward both "an aesthetics of amiable judgment" and a skeptical "repugnance of anachronism and aestheticism."[15] Deidre Lynch, in *Loving Literature*, emphasizes the continuities in attitudes toward literature rather than the conflicts, arguing that Kramnick too readily engages in the stereotype of the academic as the "thief of enjoyment," a term Lynch adopts from L. O. Aranye Fradenburg's analysis of the sacrifice of pleasure as a form of pleasure itself.[16] Though Lynch does not delve deeply into current critical modes, she identifies affects of academic labor beyond the satisfaction of forgoing enjoyment, for example the pleasure of historical research or the romantic melancholy employed in our current disciplinary crisis narratives. Her disciplinary history primarily illuminates how the redefinition of literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries means that in the study of English, love has become naturalized and therefore expected. Though Lynch makes a vital contribution to our understanding of the amorous affects of literary criticism, I remain convinced by Kramnick's account, whose claim about the tensions embedded in our discipline is borne out in my examination of vexed scholarly responses to the novels I discuss.

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[15] Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-1770* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 242.

[16] Deidre Shauna Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 76, ProQuest Ebrary. See also L. O. Aranye Fradenburg's 2002 *Sacrifice Your Love*.

The scholarly distrust that Kramnick mentions and that Lynch complicates has become an object of scholarly concern in the last two decades. In her 2003 book *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reintroduces Paul Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion," observing that this style of criticism resembles paranoia and that the use of it is now "widely understood as a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities."[17] Perhaps because many of us consider it mandatory, scholars have had difficulty defining this mode of scholarly critique or describing what other methods readers employ. Michael Warner, prompted by Sedgwick's essay, attempts to delineate what critical reading is and what it is not, concluding that our immersion in critical reading has meant that "whatever worlds are organized around frameworks of reading other than critical protocols remain, for the most part, terra incognita."[18] It is this largely unmapped territory that I explore in my dissertation. I will compare responses to the same novels—and often the same features of those novels—from scholars working in the last few decades, earlier scholars, periodical critics, and amateur critics, which will make their different techniques and affective protocols apparent.

The current affective protocols of the hermeneutics of suspicion have been most thoroughly demonstrated by Rita Felski, whose 2015 book *The Limits of Critique* arrived after I began this project but has been essential in helping me explain some of the problems I see with today's critical practices. Felski uses the term "critical mood" to describe the suspicious orientation of most scholars toward texts that has pervaded otherwise disparate methodologies and become so dominant that it obscures or invalidates other attitudes and

[17] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 125. An earlier version of this claim appeared in an introduction to a collection in 1997.
[18] Michael Warner, "Uncritical Reading," in *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical*, ed. Jane Gallop (New York: Routledge, 2005), 33.

methods. Felski writes that in the opinion of many humanistic scholars, "To refuse critique . . . is to sink into the mire of complacency, credulity, and conservatism."[19] She acknowledges that this critical mood allows for pleasure of the disciplinary sort that Lynch describes, but she objects to the way it disallows receptivity to "the multifarious and many-shaded moods of texts," as a suspicious critic is "fearful of being tricked or taken in. Locked into a cycle of punitive scrutiny and self-scrutiny, she cuts herself off from a swathe of intellectual and experiential possibility."[20] It is worth emphasizing that for groups that are routinely attacked by ideologies and policies, suspicion is self-preservation, especially considering the ways that literature informs our awareness of the world. But Felski's point that this affective orientation limits scholars is important. In my dissertation, by devoting attention to the emotional qualities of numerous responses, both professional and nonprofessional, older and newer, I hope to suggest alternatives to the dominant scholarly attitude.

Eighteenth-Century Emotion and Criticism

For reasons I will address later, I am not attempting to offer a historicist account of emotion and criticism in this dissertation. However, I will briefly discuss some of the ideas of eighteenth-century philosophers and critics that influenced the reception of gothic novels. British eighteenth-century writers were actively engaged in defining and describing both emotions and taste, which they often treated as subjective phenomena that could nonetheless be assessed according to standards of appropriateness. For some, these standards were universal, deriving from God (Joseph Addison) and humans' common

[19] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 8.
[20] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 12.

sensory makeup (David Hartley, Edmund Burke).[21] For others, they were social, established by what was beneficial to society (Lord Shaftesbury) or what had been consistently judged by others over hundreds of years (David Hume).[22] Many eighteenth-century British writers shared an interest in moderation and were invested in disciplining excess, which helped create a cultural atmosphere in which many gothic novels would be judged as inappropriate for their extremes of character and situation, and even more so for their extravagant portrayals of feeling.

To illustrate how these eighteenth-century judgments of appropriateness in art and emotion have been applied to literature and the slipperiness of this application, we can consider Adela Pinch's analysis of a passage from Henry Home, Lord Kames. Kames, the author of a thorough eighteenth-century treatment of aesthetics, discusses the need for writers to consider propriety when representing a characters' feelings. As Pinch points out, Kames makes it difficult to determine if the failures he mentions are literary or emotional:

> As Kames details the ways in which the expression of passion can be faulty—'sentiments that accord not with the passion,' sentiments that are 'unnatural,' sentiments that are 'pure rant and extravagance'—it is often unclear where the fault lies. Is Kames judging the language that a writer attributes to his or her character? Is the problem that the writer may not know the true feelings of a character well enough? Or is Kames scrutinizing the emotions themselves of a literary character? The issue of whether someone's language is suited to their passion quickly slides into the problem of whether that person's feelings are suited to their situation—whether their feelings are authentic or false.[23]

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[21] See Joseph Addison, *Essays in Criticism and Literary Theory,* ed. John Loftis (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2011); David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (New York: Garland, 1971); and Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful,* ed. Adam Phillips (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[22] See Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue, or Merit*, ed David Walford (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977); David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste" (1742), *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary,* Library of Economics and Liberty, http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmMPL23.html.

[23] Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 4.

For Pinch, this is an issue specific to eighteenth-century conceptions of emotion, but a similar problem in judging literary emotion continues beyond that historical period. For example, in 1968 critic Northrop Frye writes of Radcliffe's heroines, "We may wonder why any literary convention should have produced these absurd creatures, drizzling like a Scotch mist and fainting at every crisis in the plot."[24] And in 2009, a Goodreads reviewer writes to Radcliffe's Emily, "STOP CRYING YOU STUPID WHINY BITCH."[25] When critics judge the failure of emotional portrayals, these judgments often sound like indictments of the emotional people portrayed.

This sort of judgment of literary feeling was vigorously exercised in the eighteenth century, as periodical critics, moralists, authors, and the general public argued about the effects of new fictional forms. William Warner writes that in the early debate about novels, "the novel reader is characterized as a susceptible female whose moral life is at risk" due to the dangerous pleasures she supposedly received from early amatory fiction.[26] By the mid-eighteenth century, Warner argues, the works of Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson participated in a project of elevating the status the novel, and as the perceived cultural threat of novels in general diminished, critics and authors shifted focus to the emotional and moral value of particular kinds of novels.[27]

Those who wrote about gothic fiction in its early years often drew on this discourse to make claims for the emotional and moral benefits of these works or to condemn the

[24] Northrup Frye, *A Study in English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), 29, qtd. in Deborah D. Rogers, *Ann Radcliffe: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 106.
[25] Abi, review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe, Goodreads, October 16, 2009, http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/93134.The_Mysteries_of_Udolpho.
[26] William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 4-6.
[27] Warner, *Licensing Entertainment,* 8-9.

novels for their dangers. In 1773, poet Anna Letitia Barbauld and her husband, John Aiken, describe the emotional conflict of reading narratives of terror, in which the pain induced by the miseries described is rivaled by the pain of suspense. However, they find that the exceptions are "well-wrought scenes of artificial terror which are formed by a sublime and vigorous imagination."[28] These sorts of fictional terror, of which *The Castle of Otranto* is "a very spirited modern attempt," "elevate the soul" and provide pleasure through the combination of the terrible and the marvelous.[29] Similarly, these writers recommend works that evoke pity with a delicate hand, in which authors lighten scenes of suffering with "strokes of pleasantry and mirth," as excessive exposure to distress can "render us insensible to every thing" and even make people incapable of feeling pity for real people.[30] The novels of Ann Radcliffe, published later, would accord to these rules, but Matthew Lewis's *Monk* would violate them, which helps explain their very different contemporary reception. Barbauld and Aiken's concern about desensitization would take a more urgent form in William Wordsworth's 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth decries the emotional danger of modern life, which "blunt[s] the discriminating powers of the mind" and "produces a craving for extraordinary incident" that is satisfied by "frantic novels" that many scholars assume to be gothic.[31] The horror that early critics express at the proliferation of poorly written, formulaic gothic novels in the 1790s, which I will discuss in

[28] Anna Letitia [Aiken] Barbauld and John Aikin, "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror [. . .]" (1773), in *Novel Definitions: An Anthology of Commentary on the Novel, 1688-1815*, ed. Cheryl L. Nixon (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2009), 158.
[29] Barbauld and Aiken, "Objects of Terror," 159.
[30] Barbauld and Aiken, "An Enquiry into Those Kinds of Distress Which Excite Agreeable Sensations," (1773) in *Novel Definitions: An Anthology of Commentary on the Novel, 1688-1815*, ed. Cheryl L. Nixon (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2009), 160-161.
[31] William Wordsworth, "Preface" (1802), in William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael Mason (Harlow, UK: Pearson Educated Limited, 2007), 64-65.

chapter 1, is thus in part horror over the power of literature to shape and be shaped by the baser feelings of readers.

Gothic Scholarship

E. J. Clery identifies 1797 as "the year in which reviewers and critics began to put a name to the category of fiction we now call Gothic or the fantastic, although the name varied: 'modern Romance'; 'the *terrible* school'; 'the Terrorist System of Novel Writing'; 'Terrorist Novel Writing'; 'the *hobgoblin-romance*'."[32] James Watt argues against the critical tendency to unify the genre because "'Gothic' fiction was far less a tradition with a generic identity and significance than a domain which was open to contest from the first, constituted or structured by the often antagonistic relations between different writers and works."[33] Though I contest Watt's own contestation in my second chapter, I am less invested in judging the legitimacy of the generic categorization of gothic novels than in examining what this categorization implies for critics, especially in terms of quality and feeling. Thus, what matters most for the selection of books in this study is that critics have labeled them as gothic.

Scholars of gothic fiction have argued that, above all, gothic is a genre defined by its emotional characteristics. Coral Ann Howells names "feeling as the distinctive attribute of Gothic—feeling as it is explored and enacted in the fictions themselves, and feeling as the primary response elicited from the reader."[34] George Haggerty even claims that "Gothic form . . . is affective form. It almost goes without saying that these works are primarily

[32] E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995; 1999), 148.
[33] James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.
[34] Coral Ann Howells, *Love, Mystery and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), 5.

structured so as to elicit particular responses in the reader. Perhaps, however, it is not so obvious that Gothic fiction therefore cannot have specific meaning . . . it is central to the nature of Gothic fiction that differing interpretations will seem equally valid."[35]

Haggerty's argument here inspires my approach in this dissertation, as I try to determine how readers' situated interactions with the texts allow for different affective, evaluative, and interpretative possibilities. For example, a twenty-first-century reader who picks up *The Monk* because Stephen King recommended it will have a different experience than an eighteenth-century reader who saw an advertisement suggesting the novel would be like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and the audience for which either of those readers would write a review would shape their responses differently as well. Haggerty himself, however, turns his argument to different ends, writing that "Gothic works only become fully intelligible when we understand the extent of their affective rationale."[36] Haggerty and most other scholars of gothic and similarly emotionally dependent fiction turn either to the text itself or to its contemporary context in order to determine a novel's "affective rationale," investigating the formal, structural, verbal, and conceptual ways that the text prompts certain responses. Barbara Benedict elucidates some of this affective rationale in her examination of how sentimental fiction (including sentimental gothic) "frames" feeling in a way that simultaneously encourages and discourages it. She argues, "The conventional language, pictorial diction, tonal instability, structural fragmentation, and multiple narrative voices work to externalize these interior experiences, to deprive them of

[35] George E. Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1989), 8.
[36] Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form*, 13.

authority, and to subordinate them within a social frame."[37] For example, she writes that Ann Radcliffe's "disjunctive styles and structures . . . aestheticize emotional reactions with the discourse of spectatorship while they also exhibit control of sentimental excess."[38]

Stephen Ahern thoroughly explores the contradictions that Benedict identifies, explaining that amatory, sentimental, and gothic fiction are all rooted in the unstable concept of sensibility and thus share "an ambivalence toward excess" which "arises from two fundamental yet conflicted imperatives: sensibility is an idealist discourse that is ineradicably rooted in physiological response, and sensibility is coded according to unstable categories of class and gender difference."[39] The effects of the portrayals of extreme emotion in sensibility narratives are unpredictable, he writes, "for overwrought descriptions of pathos can quickly descend into bathos if the audience . . . is unconvinced of the authenticity of the emotion expressed. Theatricality is a necessary condition of literary forms that find their truth in scenes of heightened emotion, but it is also a destabilizing force."[40] These scholars and many others have done valuable work in clarifying the emotional functions of gothic novels, but even though they acknowledge readers' volatile responses to the mechanisms they describe, they still suggest that these novels evoke a fairly small range of emotions. For example, Napier's analysis of gothic form leads her to conclude, "A successful response to the Gothic is based on instability: one must be pleased by what one dreads, take pleasure from distress, luxuriate in terror."[41] When scholars attempt to explain what kinds of responses the emotional conventions of fiction dictate,

[37] Barbara M. Benedict, *Framing Feeling: Sentiment and Style in English Prose Fiction, 1745-1800* (New York: AMS Press, 1994), 12.
[38] Benedict, *Framing Feeling*, 173.
[39] Stephen Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities: Romantic Excess and the Genealogy of the Novel, 1680-1810* (Brooklyn, AMS Press, 2007), 12.
[40] Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities*, 45.
[41] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 147.

even when they allow for instability, they can end up suggesting that there are only a certain number of correct responses.

Most scholarly accounts of feeling in literature do not recognize actual readers' idiosyncrasies because they focus on what the construction of concepts and conventions enable. Even when the construction is built with internal contradictions, actual responses always exist in a more complicated world of influences beyond the text, and the cultural norms that may have caused contemporary readers to feel a certain way do not necessarily obtain for readers distant from the circumstances in which the text was written. Various scholars have explained the origins of the English gothic genre, its popularity, and its early critical reception as being attributable to a range of political, economic, philosophical, and social forces: anxieties about the French Revolution, foreign influences, or consumerism; dissatisfaction with Enlightenment rationality or women's position in society; and worries about the preservation of middle-class sensibilities or the growing power of the lower classes, among others.[42] This historical research allows us to situate gothic fiction in its contemporary context in several different ways, which is vital for my dissertation and scholarship on the gothic in general. However, as Felski observes, "Much work in the New Historicist vein . . . leans toward diagnosis rather than dialogue."[43] Many of these studies imply that to read gothic novels without ascribing their features to specific historical forces is to read them badly.

[42] See, for example, David Punter's *Literature of Terror* (1980) and E. J. Clery's *Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (1995).

[43] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 156. For more on recent responses to "symptomatic" reading, see Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no, 1 (Fall 2009): 1-21, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1.

Trans-historicism

Felski explains that New Historicism was an important corrective to "grand narratives"—the oversimplification of history in service of a particular perspective—but she argues that it has overcorrected by keeping texts bounded in their historical periods.[44] She writes that "standard ways of thinking about historical context are unable to explain how works of art move across time."[45] In this dissertation I am interested in the manner in which the work of novelists and critics reaches us across time—for example, in chapter 1, how present-day fans of Jane Austen learn about *The Castle of Wolfenbach* from her list of "horrid novels," or in chapter 2, how mid-twentieth-century paperback covers of *The Monk* present Lewis's novel to readers as a sexy, modern thriller, and how these mediations facilitate different responses to the texts. In my inclusion of these sorts of mediations, I am drawing on Bruno Latour's theories to some extent. Latour emphasizes the importance of the human and nonhuman mediators that enable certain ways of knowing and interacting.[46] In order to account for particular features in the current reception of the novels I write about in my dissertation, I will attempt to trace different lines of influence. These lines are not unbroken, as my reconstruction of them relies on the work that historicist scholars have done and the texts that digitizers have preserved. I would argue, though, that these

[44] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 157. In his 2005 book *The Gothic Text*, Marshall Brown revisits older modes of judging literature, contending that it is the works that have reached us across time that are most valuable, writing in defense of teleology, "A work of consequence is measure by its consequentiality: its innovations with respect to predecessors and its entailments upon successors." Marshall Brown, *The Gothic Text* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), xviii.

[45] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 154.

[46] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Latour writes that every interaction is connected to numerous actors in other places, stretching back into other times. These actors are not simultaneously visible or cohesive or equally important in a given moment, but they are all linked to the moment in question (200-202).

selections themselves are significant, as they help to demonstrate the priorities that have shaped our critical inheritance.

In gauging the importance of different critical voices, I have paid special attention to which early responses appear again and again in bibliographies and introductions and which quotations from those critical sources have served as a reference point for recent scholars. Often, scholars differ in the ways they contextualize the same response, as I examine in chapter 4 when discussing the selection and interpretation of Thomas Gray's letter to Walpole about *The Castle of Otranto*, in which he writes that it "makes some of us cry a little."[47] I note that critics use Gray's words variously as evidence that Walpole fooled his contemporaries into reading sentimentally, that earlier readers found the novel effective in a way that is no longer possible, that Walpole's inner circle understood that he meant the work to be satirical, or that Gray was simply being polite. I, in turn, read the frequent use of this quotation as evidence that critics have attempted for years to resolve the emotional indeterminacy of *Otranto* by using Gray's letter as a window into Walpole's intentions.

A trans-historical approach is especially relevant when considering how minute details of older works affect readers today. Wai Chee Dimock, in "A Theory of Resonance," calls for "diachronic" rather than synchronic historicism. She argues that "the text, as a diachronic object, yields its words differently across time, authorizing contrary readings across the ages and encouraging a kind of semantic democracy."[48] Attending to "the changes in the webs of meaning surrounding individual words," she writes that "[t]hese

[47] Thomas Gray, *The Works of Thomas Gray*, ed. Thomas James Mathias (London: Shakespeare Press, 1814), 560, Google Books.
[48] Wai Chee Dimock, "A Theory of Resonance," *PMLA* 112, no. 5 (October 1997), 1067, http://www.jstor.org/stable/463483.

semantic webs, broadening, contracting, acquiring new overtones and inflections, bear witness to the advent and retreat of social norms."[49] For instance, in chapter 3, I examine changing historical associations of the word *sweet* that could inflect different readings of Radcliffe's portrayals of femininity in *Udolpho*. I also use this technique when thinking about changes in the grammar of emotional expression in chapter 1 and the punctuation of dialogue in chapter 4. Even the smallest details of fictional texts can accrue affective associations that transform over time and alter readers' engagements with novels. Historicizing these associations allows us to see the specific ways these texts are in flux and helps some of the historical variability of responses.

Reception Studies

In addition to performing analysis that considers the ways textual features acquire different affective implications over time, in my dissertation I analyze reception in ways that attempt to account for its many situated particularities. In her recent overview of reception studies, Ika Willis explains how these particularities are important:

> Learning to read, which takes place in both formal and informal settings, also involves learning the interpretative techniques and conventions which structure both the cognitive and the affective dimensions of reading. These conventions vary socially, culturally and historically. Encounters between readers and texts are enabled, mediated and structured by these specific historical and sociocultural factors, which are also inseparable from the material technologies by means of which texts are received through the learned bodily practices of readers.[50]

[49] Dimock, "Theory of Resonance," 1060.
[50] Ika Willis, *Reception* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 108, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781317355557.

That is to say, a professional critic immersed in the age of sensibility reads a gothic novel differently from a mid-twentieth-century magazine critic with a taste for minimalism, a twenty-first-century scholar comparing electronic reproductions different editions of a gothic novel in an office reads differently than a college student on break curled up with a Kindle, etc. This degree of variation in reading practices results in markedly different responses. Though I do not conduct experiments or surveys to determine how people read, I approach reception with an awareness of how different circumstances structure reading and how public literary judgments can implicitly or explicitly recommend ways of feeling about novels.

A crucial goal of my approach to reception is to make legible the emotional conventions of recent scholars and amateur critics. As Lynch notes, the popular stereotype of scholars as emotionless is false, and this stereotype often opposes scholars to amateur readers "not yet subjected to the affective deformation that supposedly comes with formal education."[51] In Lynch's view, we are all formed (or deformed) by historical constructions of literature as an object of love, but as I discussed above, the modern history of reading literature has also constructed nonprofessional readers as a threat to themselves or to the broader culture. Willis describes the historical construction of reading as involving "the division between 'good' and 'bad' forms of reading, and the way these map on to gender, class and race"—ideas that she argues "continue to structure both critical and popular notions of audience and reception down to the present day."[52] The discourses of good and bad, tasteful and tasteless do not explicitly invoke gender, class, and race today, as they did in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, but the way they deal with

[51] Lynch, *Loving Literature*, 3.
[52] Willis, *Reception*, 15.

emotion can be a coded way of reinforcing the construction of certain groups of readers as bad.

Many of the twentieth-century writers who helped establish scholarly approaches to criticism employ language or methods that place emotion within a hierarchy. Lynne Pearce writes that the wording of W. K. Wimsatt and C. M. Beardsley's mid-twentieth-century concerns that the "affective fallacy" "ends up in impressionism and relativism" allows us to "speculate that their real anxiety is with the fact that such indeterminacy signals a reader's lack of control over both the text and the reading process; and such lack of control is, in modern Western culture, a mark of both the feminine and the un(der)educated, working class."[53] Though the formative work of reception theorists like Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Roland Barthes allows more importance to the role of the reader than previous critics did, Pearce writes that their emphasis on interpretation of the text rather than engagement with it still draws on "the gendering of knowledge" and "the class politics which has made 'the ability to interpret' the sign (and site) of bourgeois status."[54] By focusing on the emotional dimensions of responses from different kinds of critics, including scholarly ones, I am contributing to efforts to explore and validate previously devalued modes of reading and responding to literature.

Scholars have become more interested in the differences and similarities of lay and professional readers, as John Guillory terms them. Writing in 2000, he considers their forms of reading to be two entirely different practices. His description of professional

[53] Lynne Pearce, *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Arnold, 1997), 5. Pearce quotes William K. Wimsatt and C. Monroe Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954; London: Methuen, 1970), 21.
[54] Pearce, *Politics of Reading*, 6-7. She notes that though Barthes famously writes about pleasure, "The pleasure attendant upon reading . . . is predicated upon interpretation . . . and is thus construed as cognitive rather than affective" and excludes attention to the emotional dimensions of reading beyond hermeneutics (9).

reading is similar to Felski's, as one that is "*vigilant*," "stands back from," and is "wary" of pleasure.[55] For Guillory, though, this is preferable to lay reading, which he describes as solitary consumption for enjoyment or diversion alone.[56] Felski, however, argues that "in spite of their differences," academic methods of reading and common methods of reading "share certain affective and cognitive parameters."[57] In response to fears about the current status of reading outside academia and concerns about paranoid reading inside academia, Magnus Persson argues that "we should become more curious about our own and others' impassioned reading."[58] To act on this curiosity, Persson recommends studying the way more people read with more entirety. He writes, "Exploring the diversity of reading practices entails several perspectives: investigating reading practices available outside the educational system; viewing individual reading practices as a multitude of complex entities of which text interpretation is only one; and paying closer attention to the social dimensions of reading."[59] These are three of the objectives I attempt to achieve in my dissertation by focusing on the responses of amateur critics, the emotional qualities of lay and professional responses, and the ways critics influence each other, including in online forums.

The responses I use in my dissertation include periodical reviews contemporary to the novels I analyze, criticism from nineteenth-century essays or studies of literature,

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[55] John Guillory, "The Ethical Practice of Modernity: The Example of Reading," in *The Turn to Ethics*, ed. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 2000), 31.
[56] Guillory, "Ethical Practice of Modernity," 32-33.
[57] Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2008), 14. Felski identifies four "modes of textual engagement" that she refers to as recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock, which "denote multi-leveled interactions between texts and readers." These four modes, she writes, are ones that academic readers share with common readers, though academic readers may be hesitant to call them by these names.
[58] Magnus Persson, "Reading Around the Text: On the Diversity of Reading Practices in the New Popular Literary Culture," *L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature* 15 (2015): 16. http://dx.doi.org/10.17239/L1ESLL-2015.15.01.11.
[59] Persson, "Reading Around the Text," 3.

private correspondence, twentieth-century magazine articles, conference papers, dissertations, and literature blogs, but I devote the most attention to scholarly monographs and articles of the last four decades and online review criticism. In chapters, I often separate the responses of scholars and amateur critics not only because I expect my scholarly audience will view these groups differently but also because of the notable distinctions between their respective review conventions, subject matter, or tone that allow for insights into their respective affective approaches to the texts. Within those groupings, when scholars or amateurs write different kinds of emotional responses, I further subdivide them, and when the responses of scholars and amateurs are similar in some ways, I set them alongside each other. The responses I have chosen are ones that represent trends I have noticed in reception, ones that have been especially influential, and ones that offer particularly rich phrasing for analysis. Though I have been very selective in the amateur responses I quote, I attempted to read as many online reviews as possible for each novel.

Most of the online reviews I use come from Amazon, Goodreads, and LibraryThing. Megan Milota, who has contributed to establishing methodology for the quantitative study of reader response in online book reviews, has judged these three sites to be similar enough to use without differentiating among them because, in addition to their common use of a five-star rating system, they all allow "the chance to participate in the literary field, a sense of community, an opportunity to present oneself, and finally, the chance to gain or display status" (such as being named a top reviewer or begin given priority in the list of

reviews that appear).[60] All three sites aggregate ratings and reviews for particular books across most editions but have separate ratings and reviews for a handful of editions, such as ones where a novel is included in a collection. There are differences among the platforms, though: Amazon is an online megastore, whereas Goodreads (now owned by Amazon but with different ratings and reviews) and LibraryThing are social networking sites that let users record the books they've read or want to read and connect with other readers. Amazon allows ratings only with reviews, Goodreads allows ratings without reviews, and LibraryThing allows ratings with reviews but also tracks "mentions" and "conversations" (linked messages) in its forum postings. Goodreads is the most active site for amateur criticism, with its main listing for *Udolpho* featuring 11,300 ratings and 839 reviews as of March 7, 2018, whereas Amazon has 139 aggregated ratings and reviews and LibraryThing has only 45 ratings and reviews with 378 mentions and 2 conversations. Milota observes that amateur reviews tend to use review conventions, though more loosely than professional reviews, writing that "while there may have been a degree of flexibility in the format, register, and formality of reviews, they still followed an established template of what was deemed appropriate by the broader community of readers."[61] These standards are maintained through features that allow users to rate or comment on each other's reviews.

[60] Megan Milota, "From 'compelling and mystical' to 'makes you want to commit suicide': Quantifying the Spectrum of Online Reader Responses," *Scientific Study of Literature* 4, no. 2 (2014): 183, DOI: 10.1075/ssol.4.2.03mil. Milota assessed online reviews of Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, a contemporary novel that professional critics have praised a great deal for its literary qualities. After reading several reviews and noting patterns, she chose to track several factors, including plot, characters, author, and emotional response, the latter of which she defines as "explicit judgments of the text using emotive rhetoric" such as "I think it's fair to say I hated it" and "I actually really enjoyed this book" (185). She found that 86.4% of the reviews included an emotional response, but they were "not merely interested in venting," as emotional response correlated highly with mentions of the novel's aesthetic qualities, structure, and author, more "distanced" assessments (189).
[61] Milota, "'compelling and mystical,'" 192.

Milota is one of a growing number of scholars who use empirical methods to study reception, part of a broader turn toward the sciences in studying literature. Though I initially tried to analyze amateur reviews quantitatively, the correlations I found between numbers of stars and positive or negative assessments were minimal, and more often, amateur critics used mixed assessments and emotional language that demanded interpretation. Like the affectively inflected assessments of recent scholars and critics from older historical periods, these reviews present complex engagements with the text, the broader critical culture, and narratives of history that need to be more closely analyzed and considered in conjunction with the emotional features of the text and its historical and present-day positioning. In her article about the British reception of a novel about Caribbean immigrants, Anouk Lang analyzes the responses of nonprofessional readers to an online survey and in transcriptions of recorded book group discussions, selecting and interpreting these responses in a qualitative way that is more similar to my approach. As Lang points out, her method "involves reading these responses as texts in themselves," which is necessarily biased by her own perspective.[62] Like Lang, I make no claims to objectivity, but I attempt to be a thoughtful reader of others' responses.

[62] Anouk Lang, "'Enthralling but at the same time disturbing': Challenging the Readers of *Small Island*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 44, no. 2 (2009): 126. DOI: 10.1177/0021989409105122.

Implicated Criticism

Lang, in the article mentioned above, calls attention to a scholarly tendency toward "obfuscation": "Conventions of referring to one's own idiosyncratic interpretation as that of "the reader"—a convenient fiction—are normative within literary criticism, and their effects in obscuring the way interpretative differences flow from differences in the subject position, geographical location and educational training of readers are rarely remarked on."[63] This convention includes not only "the reader" but also "we" and any subjective judgment stated as objective fact. Felski writes that though many scholars look askance at the idea of objectivity, "these same critics adopt a stance of what we can call 'procedural objectivity' that screens out any flicker of emotion, tamps down idiosyncratic impulses, and steers away from the first-person voice."[64] This practice becomes especially noticeable when scholars use it to represent their own emotions about a text. For instance, in her introduction to *The Castle of Otranto*, E. J. Clery asserts that the long-suffering Hippolita's circumstances are "never so affecting" as the ones of comparable characters from other works.[65] Similarly, Napier writes that "we are virtually prevented from developing anything more than a programmed response to stock Gothic situations."[66] Though it is a scholarly norm to generalize from one's own reaction and expertise, these kinds of statements imply that readers who feel differently are feeling incorrectly.

[63] Lang, "'Enthralling,'" 125.
[64] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 48.
[65] E. J. Clery, introduction to *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996; 2008), xix.
[66] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 33.

Lynne Pearce, in *Feminism and the Politics of Reading*, provides an alternative to this scholarly way of writing about feeling by including alongside her scholarly analysis the responses of readers in feminist reading communities and extracts from her own diary-like accounts of first experiencing, remembering, and reexperiencing the texts she analyzes. She uses these more overtly affective responses to illustrate what she calls "implicated" reading—a relationship with the text that is as dynamic and complex as a relationship between lovers, including not only "*ravissement*" but also feelings like disappointment. She sets this kind of textual engagement against the professional hermeneutical reading that can be comfortably performed by feminist scholars. Her opposition of implicated reading and hermeneutical reading demonstrates the "massive *discomfort* of those of us who, as feminist readers, regularly 'commute' between these two discourses/models of reading."[67] In one of her "meta-commentaries" on her reading experience, she draws attention to the way her feminist interpretive practice "constitutes an obstacle to a more personalized and emotionally engaged one" even as she recognizes her theoretical objection to the idea that politics and emotions are separate spheres.[68] What she concludes is that the close engagement of implicated reading cannot be performed simultaneously with the distanced practices of contextualizing and interpreting.

My own reading practice, which informs the structure and method of my dissertation, often toggles between these two modes or even employs them simultaneously. My initial readings of the novels I discuss in these chapters were deeply implicated—I felt anxious for the characters, I cried over the portrayals of grief—but most of the time my critical faculties remained engaged as well, as an internal voice that noted

[67] Pearce, *Politics of Reading*, 23.
[68] Pearce, *Politics of Reading*, 102.

distracting repetition or sexism or narrative techniques, like watching a film with a director's commentary running. It is possible that my reading experience is unusual, the unconventional product of my lifelong empathetic enjoyment of sentimental and sensational fiction; my training and practice as a fiction writer and a copyeditor; and my education in eighteenth-century literature, feminism, and emotion studies. Though I have been inculcated with the mood of scholarly suspicion that Felski describes, it is also mixed with many other moods when I read, reread, and write about texts. My initial orientation toward the criticism I analyze in my dissertation was thus adversarial: I was angry that amateur critics write violently about a character I had identified with; I was frustrated that scholars assert the impossibility of feeling what I did in fact feel. But in the process of attempting to understand these critical responses, I was able to acknowledge them as being equally valid as my own, the products of different orientations, practices, knowledges, and perceptions. It is these differences, and what they can tell us about engagements with literature, that energize my dissertation.

Chapter Overviews

In my first chapter, I investigate what is "bad" about *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793), by Eliza Parsons. Tepidly received by its contemporary critics, this sentimental gothic novel was nonetheless popular, in part because it was one of the works published by Minerva Press, which catered to the taste for formulaic gothic fiction in the 1790s. Minerva was the target of critical anxiety about popular novels and their readers, which is likely why Jane Austen included several by this publisher in her list of "horrid" novels that a young woman

passes along as a recommendation in *Northanger Abbey*. Because of *Wolfenbach*'s association with Minerva and the *Northanger* Horrid Novels, scholars have tended to approach the novel as one among many of an emotional type, uninteresting in itself. I consider this categorical dismissal in light of the way the novel itself advocates for categorical interest. Employing eighteenth-century ideas about feeling, Parsons portrays and enacts a kind of emotional instruction that teaches characters and readers to respond appropriately to types of suffering without needing to know the particulars of the distressing circumstances. The methods Parsons uses to teach a way of "feeling with the formula"—didactic moralizing, conventional characters and situations, and sparse detail—become, for amateur critics today, evidence of the novel's poor literary quality. These amateurs, in turn, model ways of feeling *against* the formula, reducing *Wolfenbach* to its conventions in order to channel contempt into amusement, for example by counting the number of times characters burst into tears and categorizing the novel as one that is "so bad it's good." In contrast, Sianne Ngai's description of scholarly interest appears to offer a way of suspending critical dismissal, but in practice it also closes down responses by limiting acceptable ways to feel. By comparing the way Parsons and different forms of criticism school emotional response, I attempt to make the institutional qualities of our affective judgments of "bad" fiction more apparent, which can allow us to resist our own emotional training.

My second chapter, on Matthew Lewis's 1796 novel, *The Monk*, uses Daniel Gross's "uncomfortable situations" and Rita Felski's suspicious critical mood to further consider

the emotional constraints of criticism.[69] In contrast to *Wolfenbach*, *The Monk* has met a better reception in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries than it did when it scandalized early critics. But it has also been the subject of two very different marketing strategies during this time—one to abstract it from its sensationalism and the other to rebrand its sensationalism for modern fans of genre fiction. This tension in its publication history mirrors a tension in its scholarly reception, in which many scholars avoid discussing the novel's emotional features or dismiss them as falsely sentimental. Meanwhile, scholars who address its graphic violence and rape and its aestheticized lust in detail follow conventions of feminist analysis or close reading that end up sounding awkwardly similar to amateur responses that praise the novel's misogyny or prurience. Seeking a method for writing about the novel's feeling that avoids these critical traps, I turn to its illustrations, which allow a different approach to the novel's affective power dynamics and lead me to analyze the rhetorical struggles in its scenes of distress. In this chapter, analyzing the novel's paratexts enables me to reconsider its critical history and access a set of responses that the dominant scholarly discourse has minimized, freeing up further possibilities for scholarly analysis that resist current academic strictures.

The problem of analyzing sentimentality in *The Monk* remains difficult in our current academic context, but in my third chapter, I propose a way of exploring the particular features of Ann Radcliffe's sentimental interactions in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and tracing responses to them through the word *sweet*. Transitioning from my consideration of formal and stylistic emotion of the first two chapters, I narrow my focus in this chapter to a single word to begin an exploration of how the smallest textual features

[69] Daniel M. Gross, *Uncomfortable Situations: Emotion between Science and the Humanities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

can affect readers. I use the term "emotional taste" to describe how beliefs become embedded in diction through cultural associations and how these value-inflected keywords can contribute to different strong responses among particular groups of readers. To illustrate this idea, I closely analyze how the word *sweet*, which Radcliffe uses 131 times in *Udolpho*, creates an intratextual association with feminine emotional receptivity and influence. This association, combined with certain literary and historical associations with sweetness, could help explain why, for instance, some female amateur reviewers today respond to Radcliffe's sweetest character with violent frustration. It could also shed light on the better modern reputation of Radcliffe's *Italian*, which cloaks feminine receptive sweetness with emotional impermeability.

I close the dissertation with an investigation that includes speculation about how critical feeling could hinge on even the smallest typographical feature of a text. In my final chapter, I discuss how *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), by Horace Walpole, has puzzled readers for centuries, provoking ambivalent assessments about its literary quality that depend in large part on whether Walpole meant the novel to be comic or tragic. In reflecting on these mixed responses, I show how critics appear to seek a correct affective response by speculating about Walpole's intentions and how Walpole's inclusion in Susan Sontag's definition of camp seems to confirm beliefs that the novel is meant for the amusement of an in-crowd. However, Walpole's own framing of the novel is more ambiguous, as is his tone in the novel itself. Compounding this indeterminacy is the fact that different editions of the novel format and punctuate dialogue differently—minor changes that could have a huge effect on how readers interact with the text, as I demonstrate through amateur critics' discussion of dialogue format and scholars'

quotations of speech with exclamation points. Though minuscule, exclamation points in particular carry divergent affective associations through their literary history, and the way editors preserve or amend them in certain scenes can change the tone of the scene significantly. Since neither Walpole's statements about the novel nor the text itself provide a clear emotional directive that resolves the affective uncertainties of critics, I consider whether it is possible to approach the novel in a way that discards the idea of a correct emotional response in favor of careful attention, curiosity, and receptivity.

The ultimate goal of my dissertation is not to assert my own new and better interpretations of texts or to argue that professional or nonprofessional critics should feel differently about these novels. I would like instead to demonstrate the way all critical emotion is limited by critics' situations and to consider what those limited emotional judgments do, especially when they have the power to shape the discourse on a novel, as those of prominent critics can. Despite my own limitations, I hope to offer a broad enough range of approaches to suggest that there are many more possible directions to move in than the ones literary scholars most often choose. Even as I find myself leaning on many of the traditional academic techniques for writing with and about emotion, I am feeling around for a better way.

CHAPTER 1

Old-School:

Formulaic Feeling and Categorical Interest in *The Castle of Wolfenbach*

> We do not pretend to give this novel as one of the first order, or even of the second; it has, however, sufficient interest to be read with pleasure.
> —*Critical Review*, 1794

> The style of her writing is more adapted to suit the taste of those readers whose interest lies in incident, than to gratify any refined taste for the graces of fine writing.
> —Devendra P. Varma, introduction, 1968

> I would not claim it is a great novel. Instead, I see it as a historical document that speaks to us about the fears, beliefs, and prejudices of its era. As such it is an interesting text to study in relation to other gothic, sentimental, and melodramatic works of the 1790s.
> —Diane Long Hoeveler, introduction, 2007

> Despite any criticisms to be found, it is as I noted an enjoyable (and fast) read. I envision Parsons as perhaps a Dan Brown or Brad Meltzer of her day, the writer of fast-paced suspense thrillers that are a joy to read but forgotten as the years pass.
> —Amanda, Simpler Pastimes, 2011

As these selections suggest, the reception of Eliza Parsons's gothic novel *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) has been remarkably static, changing very little over more than two hundred years. These tepid responses temper expressions of enjoyment with judgments of quality, and rather than dismissing the novel outright, the professional critics concede that it possesses the bare minimum of "interest" necessary to recommend it. The word *interesting* has different implications in these different critical contexts, which I will discuss

later, but the professional assessments of the novel's importance and ability to involve readers, as well as the blogger's statement that it is enjoyable but forgettable, all mark the novel as only somewhat worthwhile material for reading or studying. The similarity of these critics' assessments over time might suggest that the novel is of objectively middling quality, since critics with extremely different training judge it similarly across time. However, I will argue that the relative constancy of critical judgment has less to do with quality and more to do with the way *Wolfenbach* comes to readers already classified as a certain kind of derivative, emotional novel and the manner in which this classification has been passed down for generations. This is not to say that the novel is actually good but misunderstood—in fact, I agree that the novel is formulaic and melodramatic. The novel's formula and melodrama are the traits that I see as essential to understanding what this novel can offer readers today: a better understanding of how readers learn to feel categorically according to the dictates of their cultural or critical values, and an option for learning to feel in accordance with other norms.

In contrast to the critics above, who show only liminal interest in *Wolfenbach*, I found the novel profoundly affecting and absorbing, notwithstanding its shortcomings. Like many readers, I became aware of *Wolfenbach* through its inclusion in a list of "horrid" novels that Jane Austen mentions in her gothic parody *Northanger Abbey* (1818). Curious about what constitutes a "horrid" novel, I set out to read all seven of the ones that Austen names. Though most of them engaged me, it was *Wolfenbach* that I found most compelling. Many other professional and nonprofessional readers have taken on the challenge of reading Austen's horrid book recommendations, and they seem often to begin with

Wolfenbach, since it is the first listed and first published of the seven (though several amateur critics online admit that they gave up on reading all seven).

As I read all the assessments of *Wolfenbach* I could find, I knew not to expect rapturous praise of the novel from professional critics, but I was surprised that few amateur critics showed the kind of engagement that I experienced. I scanned hundreds of online mentions of *Wolfenbach* and noticed frequent discussion of the novel's sanctimoniousness, overuse of conventions, and lack of detail on literature blogs and review sites. The blog Simpler Pastimes articulates all three of these popular concerns, objecting to "the moralizing (too much for those extremely allergic to moralizing, but easily ignorable in the context of the story—although I did find it a bit more hammered home at the end" and "the stereotyped characters—innocent damsels, valiant heroes, dastardly villains," and complaining that "description is scarce, as Parsons was seemingly more concerned with telling a fast-paced dramatic tale—nay, *melodramatic* tale—than with her settings."[1] After noting these kinds of criticisms repeatedly, I reread *Wolfenbach* in order to discover how the features that are so often disparaged in online reviews appear in the novel and how they might foreclose the kind of emotional experience I had with it. I found that focusing on these features does provide a great deal of evidence that it is poorly written. Simultaneously, these writing techniques are essential to the novel's message about the manner in which suffering can educate and elevate—what one character calls the "school of affliction." *Wolfenbach*'s preoccupation with affective instruction, which is shared by Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, drew my attention to the way critics attempt to guide readers' affective orientations toward the text by locating *Wolfenbach* or similarly

[1] Amanda, "Completed: Castle of Wolfenbach," Simpler Pastimes, October 20, 2011, https://simplerpastimes.wordpress.com/2011/10/20/completed-castle-of-wolfenbach/.

marginal works within a hierarchy of literature—performing a sort of emotional instruction of their own.

By attending to, rather than dismissing, the aspects of Parsons's writing that seem bad, I plan to show how the implicit beliefs of her writing techniques harmonize with prevalent eighteenth-century British teachings and clash with common beliefs today, despite the fact that critiques of *Wolfenbach* often employ the same techniques in different contexts. In this chapter I will discuss the emotionally didactic conventions of both *Wolfenbach* and its criticism. In the first section, I will offer some background to situate the novel. I will begin with the eighteenth-century ideas about moral instruction and literature that likely affected Parsons's decision to foreground affective education in her novel and shaped the anti-gothic rhetoric of her time and beyond. Then I will discuss the ways that *Wolfenbach* has been framed in different eras by its association with Minerva Press and *Northanger Abbey*, and I will trace its publication history from its early editions to the mid-twentieth century, after which the novel lay dormant for several years. In the second section, I will close-read the emotional "school" that *Wolfenbach*'s formal and mechanical features construct, introducing its teachers and students, its institutional character, and its texts, and I will analyze its tendency to categorize and universalize. In the third section, I will consider how the more pedagogical scholarly treatments of the *Northanger* Horrid Novels and the emotional modeling in responses to *Wolfenbach* "teach" resistant attitudes toward Parsons's novel that paradoxically resemble *Wolfenbach*'s school in the way they judge through categories and universal statements. In the final section, I will consider what values are being taught in current critical schools, how these values differ from those

expressed by *Wolfenbach*, and how we as critics might become more aware of the attitudes we have learned.

Emotional Education

In the eighteenth century, periodical critics, authors, and other writers placed novels at the center of a debate about emotional and moral norms. As novels became popular early in the century, literary critics and moralists warned about the dangers of fiction for women and young people. Concerns about the reading habits of women in particular were widespread. In *Regulating Readers*, Ellen Gardiner writes that for women of the emerging British middle class, whose formal education was limited, acceptable reading materials like conduct books were meant "to teach women how to structure their inner worlds or their behavior in their private lives as citizens."[2] This private moral education was threatened by the fact that women appeared to favor novels, which critics claimed aroused their emotions alarmingly, causing them to become preoccupied with love and lust.[3] After mid-eighteenth-century works like *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones* helped novels earn a reputation as tools for inculcating morality, public discourse about fiction refocused on ensuring that the most impressionable readers received proper instruction from it.[4] In 1750, Samuel Johnson famously called for novels to provide good examples, writing that they ought "to teach the

[2] Ellen Gardiner, *Regulating Readers: Gender and Literary Criticism in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 18.
[3] Gardiner, *Regulating Readers*, 18.
[4] For more on this process, see William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

means of avoiding the snares which are laid by Treachery for Innocence."[5] Critics and novelists alike began to view fiction as a source of edification that could provide a template for feeling and acting. Markman Ellis describes how novels of sensibility, like Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1769), became part of a conscious attempt to develop readers' empathy and thereby encourage benevolent actions.[6] However, critics continued to fear that the wrong kind of novels could corrupt vulnerable readers.

As more and more novels were published, periodical reviewers took seriously their role of supervising what fiction taught, castigating immoral portrayals and cautiously praising moral ones. Joseph Bartolomeo observes, "Even novels that promised laudable instruction received careful scrutiny as reviewers searched for moral integrity."[7] For example, some critics took sentimental novels to task for promoting excessive feeling over good conduct. In 1793, the year *Wolfenbach* was published, a critic in the influential periodical the *Monthly Review* wrote of "most novel writers, except those of the very first class": "They teach us to consider every failure of our wishes as an insupportable misfortune, instead of convincing us that misfortunes are often the creatures of our own fancy; in short, to weep and wail is the morality that such writers teach!"[8] Though this critic was not reviewing *Wolfenbach*, these complaints could be applied to that work, despite the fact that Parsons herself raises concerns about self-absorption. As a writer of stories of misery who was not considered to be "of the very first class," she was easily folded into

[5] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* 4 (March 31, 1750), *The Rambler, In Four Volumes*, vol. 1 (London: 1761), 20. Google Books.
[6] Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17.
[7] Joseph F. Bartolomeo, *A New Species of Criticism: Eighteenth-Century Discourse on the Novel* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 124.
[8] Review of *The Count de Hoensdern: A German Tale*, by the author of *Constance*, *The Monthly Review* (November 1793), *The Monthly Review; Or, Literary Journal, Enlarged*, vol. 12 (London: Griffiths, 1794): 338. Google Books.

broader critiques of the growing number of emotional novels of middling quality and questionable moral and emotional character.

Eighteenth-century literary critics valued not only fine writing and feeling but also uniqueness, a quality that they emphasized often as the growth in the print market produced an incipient mass culture.[9] In the 1790s, the sheer number of gothic novels being written, published, and borrowed or bought by enthusiastic readers made critics especially skeptical about whether any of them were worthwhile. To be judged positively, a gothic novel needed to distinguish itself from many others of its kind, and Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* was one of few to do so. A periodical critic thought to be Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in defending his previous review of *Udolpho* from accusations that it denigrated the work, writes that he would in fact call it "[t]he most interesting novel in the English language."[10] This high praise was not at all typical of reviews of gothic novels. Bartolomeo notes that more often, periodical reviewers judged gothic novels deficient because they lacked innovation. Yet, originality in gothic fiction was an ever-shifting standard that even Radcliffe could not always meet, and it was a quality that could easily become the subject of accusations that inventive gothic novels employed "excess for the sake of novelty and for the sake of pleasing a bloodthirsty readership."[11] At the time of the publication of *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, the two journals that reviewed the novel alluded to the villainous extremes it contains, but its scenes of bloody violence did not provoke

[9] As Ann Cvetkovich points out, modern critics tend to misapply the Victorian distinction of high and low culture to eighteenth-century fiction. However, E. J. Clery argues that it is eighteenth-century phenomena like the popular taste for gothic fiction that necessitated the later formation of this distinction. Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 139.
[10] Addendum to review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe, *Critical Review* ser. 2, no. 12 (November 1794), qtd. in Cheryl L. Nixon, ed., *Novel Definitions: An Anthology of Commentary on the Novel, 1688-1815* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2009), 292.
[11] Bartolomeo, *New Species of Criticism*, 136-137, 141.

accusations of "excess for the sake of novelty," as was the case with Matthew Lewis's later novel, *The Monk*, which I will discuss in the following chapter. Though its reviewers did not find *Wolfenbach* as "interesting" as Radcliffe's exemplary work, they ranked it somewhere above many works of its type in its capacity to involve readers. A reviewer in the conservative quarterly the *British Critic* writes that *Wolfenbach* is "more interesting than the general run of modern novels" and "abounds with interesting, though improbable situations."[12] The prominent *Critical Review*, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, sums up the novel in 1794 by claiming it "has . . . sufficient interest to be read with pleasure."[13] *Wolfenbach*, shortly after its publication, was "interesting" in the sense that the mysteries and adventures of its characters kept readers' curiosity engaged, but its interest would soon be overshadowed by its affiliation with other works of its type.

Parsons's literary talent merited some amount of distinction from contemporary critics, but her writing was tainted by association with her publisher, Minerva Press. In a very brief review of Parsons's *Woman as She Should Be*, a novel she published the same year as *Wolfenbach*, the *Critical Review* calls her "a writer of no inferior talents," but ends the review with the tentative statement, "Upon the whole, we consider this lady's labours less deserving the severity of critical remark than the general run of publications from the press of Mr. Lane."[14] In the 1790s, the decade *Wolfenbach* was published, William Lane's Minerva Press produced approximately a third of new novels in London,[15] many of which

[12] Review of *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, by Eliza Parsons, *British Critic: A New Review* 3 (February 1794): 199, 200. Google Books.
[13] Review of *The Castle of Wolfenbach,* by Eliza Parsons, *Critical Review; Or, Annals of Literature* 10 (January 1794): 50. Google Books.
[14] Review of *Woman as She Should Be; or, Memoirs of Mrs. Manville,* by Eliza Parsons, *Critical Review; Or, Annals of Literature* 9 (September 1793): 118. Google Books.
[15] William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 244. Google Books.

were sentimental, gothic, or, like *Wolfenbach*, both. These novels were widely distributed and read through Lane's numerous circulating libraries, and the fact that many of their authors were anonymous or pseudonymous did not hinder their popularity, as the Minerva name itself promised similar style and quality that appealed to many readers—what E. J. Clery calls a "unified corporate style."[16] This brand did not appeal to everyone, however. A 1796 assessment of a Minerva novel in the *Critical Review* reads, "Since Mrs. Radcliffe's justly admired and successful romances, the press has teemed with stories of haunted castles and visionary terrors; the incidents of which are so little diversified, that criticism is at a loss to vary its remarks."[17] This kind of apprehension about the mass production of formulaic gothic novels that Minerva enabled and the threat it presented to the powers of discrimination was coupled in some periodicals with a reignited moral panic over women's reading. Though Minerva presented its novels as morally edifying and published many Radcliffean works, critics accused the press of spreading corruption with sensationalism and sensuality.[18] For example, a 1797 letter in *Gentleman's Magazine* argues that young women who read novels from circulating libraries have their imaginations "debauched by licentious description, and lascivious images."[19]

Numerous critic combated the aesthetic and moral menace of popular fiction like Minerva's with contempt and mockery. By the early nineteenth century, Dorothy Blakey writes, critics were using "Minerva" as a synonym for cheap, poorly written, melodramatic,

[16] Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 137.
[17] Review of *Austenburn Castle,* by an unpatronized female, *Critical Review; Or, Annals of Literature* 16 (February 1796): 222, Google Books.
[18] Carol Margaret Davison, *History of the Gothic: Gothic Literature 1764-1824* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), 109.
[19] Eusebius, "Original Thoughts on the Reading of Novels," *Gentleman's Magazine* 82 (November 1797), 912, Google Books.

and formulaic.[20] Even before, in the late 1790s, several gothic "recipes" appeared. An often quoted one from a critique of circulating library fiction in 1797 reads:

> *Take*—An old castle, half of it ruinous.
> A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.
> Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.
> As many skeletons, in chests and presses.
> An old woman hanging by the neck, with her throat cut.
> Assassins and desperadoes, *quant. suff*.
> Noises, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.
> Mix them together, in the form of three volumes, to be taken at any of the watering-places before going to bed.[21]

According to James Watt, these criticisms of Minerva and other similar publishers "were always motivated by much larger concerns about the regulation of cultural production and the disciplining of readers—especially women and the lower classes," and yet these early objections and "recipe satires" of gothic formula have persisted in scholarly discourse as grounds for dismissing the vast majority of popular gothic novels.[22] For example, Diane Long Hoeveler in her introduction to the Valancourt edition of *Wolfenbach* summarizes Parsons's work as "writing to the gothic formula that had been established already: part sentimental virtue in distress, part novel of manners, part melodramatic confrontation between good and evil."[23] Elizabeth Neiman adds nuance to these sorts of assessments of formulaic fiction by demonstrating Minerva novelists' communal contributions to

[20] Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press, 1790-1820* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1935; 1939), 1.
[21] "Terrorist Novel Writing," *The Spirit of Public Journals, for 1797*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (London: James Ridgeway, 1802), 229. Google Books.
[22] James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5.
[23] Diane Long Hoeveler, introduction to *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, by Eliza Parsons (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2006; 2007), x.

Romantic-era ideas of authorship.[24] Even so, what Blakey wrote in 1935 is equally true today: "Few authors whose reputation has endured until to-day have owned a connexion with the Minerva Press."[25]

Minerva Press and its lingering bad reputation may have influenced the fact that *The Castle of Wolfenbach* has rarely been treated as worthwhile by professional critics in any era, but an even more powerful contributor to the perception of *Wolfenbach* has been its status as one of the seven *Northanger* "horrid" novels, six of which were published by Minerva Press. We can assume that Jane Austen's parodic *Northanger Abbey*, begun in 1798 amid the explosion in gothic novels but not published until 1818, deserves most of the credit for the fact that *Wolfenbach* is in print today, and the fact that readers today tend to express a mixture of disdain and delight when they choose to read it. In Austen's novel, young Isabella Thorpe passes along book recommendations from her friend Miss Andrews ("one of the sweetest creatures in the world") to Catherine Morland, a fellow Radcliffe enthusiast. Isabella lists seven novels "of the same kind" as Radcliffe's: (in Isabella's order) *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793, Eliza Parsons); *Clermont* (1798, Regina Maria Roche); *The Mysterious Warning* (1796, also Parsons); *The Necromancer* (1794, Carl Friedrich Kahlert, translated by Peter Teuthold); *The Midnight Bell* (1798, Francis Lathom); *The Orphan of the Rhine* (1798, Eleanor Sleath); and *Horrid Mysteries* (1796, Carl Grosse). Before accepting these recommendations, Catherine demands assurance that these novels are "all horrid."[26] Several scholars have speculated about why Austen chose these particular novels for her

[24] Elizabeth A. Neiman, "A New Perspective on the Minerva Press's 'Derivative' Novels: Authorizing Borrowed Material," *European Romantic Review* 26, no. 5 (2015): 633-658, https://doi.org/10.1080/10509585.2015.1070344.
[25] Blakey, *Minerva Press*, 48.
[26] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey and Other Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25.

list of horrid works. Bette Roberts suggests that "she regards them in all likelihood as typical of the very worst of the genre."[27] Natalie Neill characterizes them as "popular and fashionable, yet also shallow, manipulative, mercenary, emotive, and prone to exaggeration."[28] These scholars and others argue that Austen parodies the Horrid Novels in order to elevate Radcliffe's better productions and as well as her own realistic work.

Many scholars have complicated the popular reading of *Northanger* as a simple anti-gothic satire, but the narrator's mocking tone speaks volumes in the ironic introduction to this scene as one that will demonstrate the young women's "delicacy, discretion, originality of thought, and literary taste."[29] Austen finds humor in the contrast between the "sweet" manners of the list maker, Miss Andrews, and her insatiable craving for formulaic, bloody gothic stories. The scene presents these novels as Radcliffe knockoffs and fun, frivolous reading, not novels worthy of serious attention. In explaining *Northanger*'s usage of the term *horrid*, Claudia Johnson points out that "horror is a de rigueur affect of gothic fiction" and that Austen employs the term in various contexts to suggest that it is overused.[30] Additionally, the young women's indiscriminate application of the word and its variants throughout the novel illustrates the ambivalence of this descriptor. Horror, as a feeling, is different from *horrid*, which is more often a judgment of quality. Though Isabella and Catherine here use it as a positive term that suggests these novels will pleasantly horrify, just after this Isabella uses *horrid* to mean unreadable when discussing Richardson's *Sir*

[27] Bette B. Roberts, "The Horrid Novels: *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Northanger Abbey*," in *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*, ed. Kenneth W. Graham (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 90.
[28] Natalie Neill, "'the trash with which the press now groans': *Northanger Abbey* and the Gothic Best Sellers of the 1790s," *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* 4 (2004) 166.
[29] Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 24.
[30] Claudia L. Johnson, notes to *Northanger Abbey and Other Works*, by Jane Austen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 363.

Charles Grandison.[31] The word easily slips between referring to sensational content and signifying poor writing, making it ideal for labeling certain gothic novels as thrilling works with no merit and no individuality. It makes sense that several scholars have preferred the term "*Northanger* Horrid Novels" to simply "*Northanger* Novels" or "*Northanger* Canon" when alluding to the seven works, which have become representatives of bad gothic writing. In this way, many scholarly mentions of these books come packaged in condescension.

Wolfenbach's publication history through the twentieth century tended to reinforce the message that it is low-quality genre fiction, even when the novel shared space in a volume with more highly regarded works. Minerva, with its reputation for cheapness, printed the first edition of *Wolfenbach* in 1793 and the second in 1794.[32] In 1824 it was reprinted with the title *Castle of Wolfenbach; or the Horrid Machinations of Count Berniti* as one of Fisher's Editions, which Montague Summers describes as "dumpy little books," inexpensive engraved editions of gothic favorites.[33] An 1835 edition by J. Pattie was first published weekly as one of Pattie's Pocket Library of Popular Novels and Romances, at a penny for each sixteen-page packet.[34] In 1839 it was included in volume 1 of *The Romancist, and Novelist's Library: The Best Works of the Best Authors* alongside more reputable works, like *The Man of Feeling* and Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, but in a cheap edition. It shared space with Radcliffe's *Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* in an 1854

[31] Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 26.
[32] Joseph Crawford points out that even scholarly assumptions about those who bought Minerva novels (at about three shillings and sixpence) or used circulating libraries fail to take into account that the masses would not have been able to afford the extravagance of gothic novels in the 1790s. Joseph Crawford, *Gothic Fiction and the Invention of Terrorism: The Politics and Aesthetics of Fear in the Age of the Reign of Terror* (London: Bloomsbury 2013), 131.
[33] Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 101.
[34] Advertisement, *Figaro in London* 3 (1834), 78. Google Books.

edition by The Booksellers, presumably because by that time publishers suspected it wouldn't sell on its own. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, critics attempted to discern whether the Austen's Horrid Novels were even actual books. It is surprising that a novel with six printings in sixty years could be so completely forgotten, but Richard Burton in his 1909 study *Masters of the English Novel* reveals the belief that novels like the ones satirized in *Northanger* were ephemeral productions with no cultural value: "the tendency of eighteenth century fiction, with its handling of the bizarre and sensational . . . was but an eddy in a current which was setting strong and steadily toward the realistic portrayal of contemporary society."[35] Even after *Wolfenbach* and the other Horrid Novels had been rediscovered, their recuperation was halfhearted. Writing in the 1920s, Michael Sadleir, a writer, publisher, and book collector who reignited interest in the gothic, accuses Parsons of cynically writing to the formula of what would sell and asserts that her moments of "astringent character-fiction" are so marred by the trappings of terror novels that "one turns embarrassed from the sight of them, as from bare patches" in a formerly fine carpet.[36] Folio Press eventually reprinted *Wolfenbach* in 1968, but as part of a collection damningly titled The Northanger Set of Jane Austen's Horrid Novels, and after that publication, it went out of print for decades. I will return to *Wolfenbach*'s publication history later in the chapter, considering the novel's later editions in conjunction with recent responses. Now that I have broadly addressed how the novel arrived amid a debate about literary value and moral and emotional norms and how Parsons's novel became

[35] Richard Burton, *Masters of the English Novel: A Study of Principles and Personalities*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909, 98. Google Books.
[36] Michael Sadleir, "'All Horrid?': Jane Austen and The Gothic Romance," in *Things Past* (London: Constable, 1944), 184. This essay was published in different versions, including in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1927.

caught up in a persistent discourse about genre fiction and distinction, I will devote the next section to *Wolfenbach*'s own engagement with these issues.

The School of Affliction

The Castle of Wolfenbach is often criticized today for its heavy-handed morality, and its strongest moral messages revolve around suffering. These messages are didactic in both content and form, and their didacticism is essential in understanding the novel. In the *Wolfenbach*, women absorb and impart life lessons through stories of affliction. The central stories of affliction are those of Matilda Weimar; her mother, the Countess Berniti; and two of her mentors, the Countess of Wolfenbach and Mother Magdalene. The young heroine, Matilda, was raised as an orphan by her uncle. We later learn that her uncle murdered her father, kidnapped baby Matilda, and replaced her with dead infant, making her mother believe she had lost both her husband and her child. Though Matilda had a peaceful childhood, when she matured, her uncle lusted after her and planned to entrap her in marriage by raping her. She overheard his plans and fled, finding shelter at the Castle of Wolfenbach in the beginning of the novel. Wolfenbach is thought to be haunted, but its supposed ghost is actually the Countess of Wolfenbach, who was imprisoned in a wing of the castle for eighteen years after her tyrannical husband murdered the man she had once intended to marry, took her baby, and tried to kill her. After Matilda discovers and befriends the Countess of Wolfenbach, the Countess is kidnapped, and Matilda goes to live with the Countess's sister, the Marchioness de Melfort. Through her, Matilda meets the Count de Bouville, who falls in love with her, but Matilda does not want to disgrace him

with her apparent lack of status and enters a convent. At the convent, she meets Mother Magdalene, whose parents died tragically and left her and her siblings in poverty, which she refused to remedy by becoming the mistress of her admirer, choosing the convent instead. Matilda, the Countess Berniti, the Countess of Wolfenbach, and Mother Magdalene all tell their tragic stories, and these stories of past sorrows drive the plot as much as the present loves and dangers do. For Sue Chaplin, who recently analyzed the novel, the significance of these life histories is the way they show how "Female experiences of trauma are . . . mirrored back and forth across the generations, and women rely on the support of other women to narrate and expose these injustices" in the absence of legal protection from men.[37] These narratives of injustice, however, serve as more than cautionary tales or extralegal support in the novel. Through the stories of suffering that Matilda hears throughout the novel, she learns cultural norms for responding to others in distress, and she gains a sense of her own place in the world.

The Countess of Wolfenbach and Mother Magdalene, Matilda's two primary instructors on suffering, inform Matilda about the properties of affliction and the proper response to the afflicted. These older women, a countess and a nun, describe suffering in a remarkably similar way, though they have never met. While they hope Matilda will be spared the tribulation they have endured, they also acknowledge its benefits. The Countess informs Matilda that she is "but young in the school of affliction," and Mother Magdalene tells her that she is "yet a novice in affliction."[38] These metaphors imply that the troubles of

[37] Sue Chaplin, "Female Gothic and the Law," in *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 142.

[38] Eliza Parsons, *The Castle of Wolfenbach* (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2007), 18, 141. I use the most recent edition of the novel because it is the one most current readers likely own (though often in its electronic form) and is thus useful for considering how audiences today respond to it. However, all the quotations I use match the original edition exactly, even in punctuation, with one notable exception that I will address shortly.

life, like an educational institution or a religious order, initiate the inexperienced into specialized knowledge that can be very valuable, and while Matilda's early persecution has begun this education, she has much to learn.

This "school of affliction" teaches its students to gauge the proportion of different human miseries, which Parsons presents as an essential skill. Because Matilda has not yet encountered life's hard lessons, the Countess tells her, "[Y]ou can feel only for yourself."[39] Suffering, according to these learned older women, makes a person less self-absorbed. As Mother Magdalene explains, "[W]e are all apt to magnify our own troubles, and think them superior to what others feel . . . when you know more of the world you will know also that there are varieties of misery which assail the human frame,—and 'tis our own feelings that constitute great part of our distress."[40] In this view, it is desirable to think less of one's own difficulties, not only because it reduces the pain of them but also because it is essential for absorbing the knowledge that affliction imparts: the taxonomy of human misery. These women believe that suffering takes distinct forms, "varieties" that can be categorized. The individual experience of suffering is measurable, as one can assess what constitutes the "great part" of it, but a person tends to "magnify" the true size of their suffering in relation to others' unless she learns, through experience, a sense of proportion. Advanced students in affliction have learned to quantify and categorize misery and can better assess their own portion of it as well as evaluating that of others. This mandate that people ought to prioritize others even in the midst of their own distressing circumstances could strike a modern reader as sanctimonious insensitivity, and the idea that this practice is part of a necessary education in ranking painful situations could feel to today's readers like a bizarre

[39] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 18.
[40] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 141.

dissection of human experience. However, within the novel, this lesson is the key to ethical action, based in principles on which all wise and virtuous people can agree.

The characters' profession of a belief in universal standards and measurements for human suffering corresponds with eighteenth-century philosophy. Adam Smith, author of the most famous eighteenth-century description of sympathy, often writes from a place of absolute assurance in his statements about the proper amount to feel and the proper degree to express those feelings. In 1759 he writes, "Grief and resentment for private misfortunes and injuries may easily . . . be too high, and in the greater part of mankind they are so."[41] This assertion could easily come from Parsons's Mother Magdalene, as well as from other philosophers of Smith's time, who confidently distinguish among many categories of experience, taxonomizing human life. Jeremy Bentham, the utilitarian philosopher, goes even further than Smith, offering a "catalogue" of pain, and its opposite, pleasure. In his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1790), he provides numbered lists of each type of pain and pleasure, further subdividing these into numbered lists of the situations that produce these types.[42] To readers today who have been trained to value particularity and contextual specificity, this may seem incredibly reductive, though I will later consider how we still make use of certain norms for categorizing and responding to suffering when it is fictional.

The belief in the quantifiability of suffering that eighteenth-century philosophers hold in common with the characters of *Wolfenbach* relies on the concept of universal truth. The Countess of Wolfenbach and Mother Magdalene, who do not know each other, are the

[41] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000 [1759], 31.
[42] Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907 [1780]), Library of Economics and Liberty, http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML5.html.

main purveyors of this universal truth, and as such, they share many similarities. Aside from being persecuted women who have derived wisdom from misery, each performs a similar function in the plot, mentoring Matilda in a time of vulnerability, and each has a long story of woe to tell that is deferred to enhance interest of the kind that its early reviewers alluded to. Scholars have focused on some of these similarities to draw parallels between these characters and others in the novel, or to other fictional women, or to real women.[43] However, looking at the form of their speech separates these two characters from comparable ones. Unlike other characters in the novel, Mother Magdalene and the Countess speak often in aphorisms, especially about virtue and suffering. The form of the aphorism implies universal truth; thus, these two sound not only like each other, but like the voice of morality itself. Mother Magdalene professes that "reason can subdue every affliction but what arises from a condemnation within."[44] In a similar tone, the Countess states that "the best claim to a generous mind, is being unfortunate with merit that deserves a better fate . . . the truly benificent mind looks upon every child of sorrow as their relation . . . when beauty and virtue suffer, from whatsoever cause . . . they receive a superior gratification that have the power of relieving sorrows, than the receiver can in accepting the favors."[45] These maxims strongly resemble each other as well as the voice of

[43] For instance, Claudia Stumpf reads these and other characters as doubles of Matilda, all therapeutically repeating the same traumatic stories. Beatríz Sánchez Santos argues that the Countess, Mother Magdalene, and Matilda reveal alternate life paths for the same woman placed in different situations and draw on portrayals of women in other fictional works. Réka Tóth goes even further, suggesting that the resemblance of the Countess and Matilda acts as a message about the travails of women in general. Claudia J. Stumpf, "Telling It Over, Over Again: *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, Traumatic Repetition, and the Failure of Closure in the Gothic Novel," November 2012, http://www.academia.edu/5137499; Beatríz Sánchez Santos, introduction to *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, by Eliza Parsons, The Northanger Library Project, 2009, lx-lxi; Réka Tóth, "The Plight of the Gothic Heroine: Female Development and Relationships in Eighteenth Century Female Gothic Fiction," *Eger Journal of English Studies* 10 (2010), 35.

[44] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 141.

[45] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 116.

the narrator, who informs the reader that "beauty in distress has a thousand claims upon a susceptible mind."[46]

The resemblance of their speech can make the characters seem conventional to the point of two-dimensionality, but the fact that the two wise women characters and the narrator deliver similar maxims is not (or not only) lazy writing, but rather reveals the institutional character of the novel's emotional values. These aphorisms suggest timeless truths through their form alone, and they further contain abstractions that elevate the universal over the particular. The Marquis and Marchioness, who informally adopt Matilda, become "a generous mind" or a "benificent mind"; Matilda becomes a "child of sorrow" or "beauty and virtue"; the Countess becomes "beauty in distress." These abstractions and the precepts that contain them foreground concepts while making the actual individuals and circumstances (and even the speaking situation itself) inconsequential.[47] This minimization is reinforced by the fact that suffering can spring from "whatsoever cause," as if the actual details of the oppression are unimportant.

This form of speech, and the beliefs it represents, imposes rules and obscures particularity in a way that modern readers would probably resist. Yet this abstraction expresses the novel's emotional instruction—painful experiences teach a person to rise above self-involvement and the distraction of details and instead recognize and learn to respond properly to the misery of others. This recognition and response, in the novel's view, can occur only when a person learns objective standards for assessing suffering. Parsons suggests that an abstracted view of suffering allows people to see universal moral

[46] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 131.
[47] Santos makes a similar point about Matilda's frequently abstracted descriptions, arguing that they illustrate the way in which she serves as a conventional "vessel of virtue" more than a mere virtuous woman of the sort that could serve as a didactic exemplar. Santos, introduction, lxvii.

truths, and the fact that her wisest, most afflicted characters speak in the same manner as each other and as the narrator implies that truth takes the same form for everyone, once they learn how to access it. In this school, teachers, texts, and students all embrace the same institutional values and mission, prioritizing universality over self-interest and difference.

Only graduates of this school can access the moral truths of suffering. The Marchioness, though also an older woman who mentors Matilda, has enjoyed love, ease, and fortune, so she cannot counsel Matilda on torment. The Count of Wolfenbach, in contrast, has learned so much from his lifetime of vile actions and the pain they have caused him that he can impart the aphoristic knowledge that "the man conscious of his wickedness, with doubt and terror gnawing at his heart, is the most miserable of human beings."[48] The Count De Bouville, Matilda's lover, would seem to have acquired universal knowledge when he reassures Matilda that her status as an orphan does not negate her value: "she who with merit, with good sense, delicacy, and refined sentiments can command respect, is a thousand times superior to those whose inferiority of mind disgraces a rank which the other would ennoble."[49] However, unlike the other maxims, his sidesteps the relationship of virtue to affliction. He also prefaces his confident statement with "Pardon me, madam . . . if I presume to say you judge erroneously," undermining his attempt to occupy the role of a teacher of universal truths.[50]

In this same conversation between Matilda and Bouville, Matilda reveals her status as a student who is just beginning to understand the wisdom of suffering. She tells him,

[48] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 151.
[49] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 116.
[50] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 116.

"[T]o generous spirits like your's and this family's, misfortunes are a recommendation to kindness and attention, but with the generality of mankind I have not to learn it must be otherwise."[51] Matilda acknowledges that suffering should merit sympathy and assistance, as the wise women do, but she focuses more on her own experience with specific altruistic people and the more common indifferent people rather than making an assertion of moral truth. The situated, particularized nature of this statement combines with the awkward phrasing of "I have not to learn" to highlight the fact that while Matilda has some knowledge and experience, she has more to gain before she can reach a state of objective wisdom. Karen Morton, in her 2011 study on Eliza Parsons, complicates Matilda's role as a student by alluding to a scene in which the Countess seeks romantic advice from her. Despite the fact that Matilda objects that she is "incompetent to advise,"[52] Morton implies she is in fact qualified to dispense wisdom, and that the Countess recognizes her qualification in the fact that Matilda, too, is a woman who has suffered.[53] However, at this point in her journey, Matilda's education is still incomplete, and she refuses to counsel her mentor. By the end of the novel, Matilda is able to write to her other former teacher Mother Magdalene, thanking her for her life lessons and aphoristically asserting that "the unfortunate have claims upon the hearts of those whom God has blessed with affluence."[54] The fact that the style and substance of this statement mirrors the novel's other statements about suffering shows that Matilda has successfully absorbed the lessons that pain imparts and is now able to disseminate those ideas herself. This letter is the final paragraph of the

[51] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 115.
[52] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 117.
[53] Karen Morton, *A Life Marketed as Fiction: An Analysis of the Works of Eliza Parsons* (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2011), 176.
[54] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 202-203.

book, and its placement reinforces the importance in the novel of teaching with stories, learning from misfortune, and responding to suffering in the objectively proper way. Elizabeth Napier writes of this letter and other explicitly moral endings to gothic novels, "The strident tones and crude attempts at emphasis . . . reveal a mingled determination to be explicit about the moral lessons to be gained from such tales of adventure and an uncertainty about the relevance of those 'lessons' to the narrative that has produced them."[55] While Napier sees the form of expression as evidence that clumsy writers are tacking on unrelated morals, more recent scholars like Morton tend to seek disjunctions between morals and plots as sites of complexity and resistance to social standards. In this case, however, the form of expression itself is part of the message, and it is a message that remains consistent throughout the novel.

The school of affliction that the characters teach and learn within trains its students to impose rules and obscure particularity in service of recognizing timeless truths and responding correctly to other sufferers. One way this occurs in practice is that characters' responses to sad circumstances are often determined not by personal interest and emotion but by a sort of categorical interest that dictates emotional involvement. When Matilda meets the Countess of Wolfenbach for the first time and relates her history as an orphan and the story of her escape from her uncle, she ends the tale by characterizing it as "tedious and little interesting to you."[56] Her professed certainty that the Countess finds her narrative tiresome may be only politeness, but the confidence of her phrasing introduces the idea that a person can predict whether a story of hardships will involve a listener, even

[55] Elizabeth R. Napier, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 14-15.
[56] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 16.

a listener she knows nothing about. The Countess, in turn, furthers this idea by responding, "Dearest madam . . . can you think it possible I should be uninterested for a situation like yours? Young, new to the world, with uncommon attractions, without friends or protectors, surely misfortunes have taken an early hold in your destiny."[57] She suggests that the combination of Matilda's personal virtues and difficulties make her automatically worthy of concern. This list of Matilda's assets and deficits appears to be a description of her "situation," as if her qualities themselves constitute her circumstances or social position, and it is these status markers that the Countess uses to explain why she has no choice but to become involved. Her interest is conditional to Matilda's societal "place" as a lovely young woman in need of help, rather than being the product of any of the details of Matilda's account. The Countess does not even need to know the specific troubles Matilda faces, because she recognizes Matilda as a member of a category of people who have a claim on the emotional and financial involvement of any sensible person. Beatríz Sánchez Santos touches on the novel's use of the word *uncommon* as it appears here, to indicate the fact that certain characters are extraordinary beyond what can be expressed in words alone. In these cases, form substitutes for specificity, as the use of the word *uncommon* recalls fairytale conventions of extreme virtue and beauty.[58] The rules of what kind of person or situation requires sympathy and aid are an essential part of the instruction of the school of affliction.

[57] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 16. In the eighteenth century, *uninterested* had an emotional connotation. The Oxford English Dictionary's example from the Annual Register in 1772 reads, "He is no cold, uninterested, and uninteresting advocate for the cause he espouses." The OED's example from *The Trinket*, an epistolary novel by "a lady" from 1774, reads, "In this amiable society can my heart be uninterested?"
[58] Santos, introduction, xxvii.

Modern readers may find the idea that certain types of people automatically merit sympathy distasteful. Roche's *Clermont*, another of the *Northanger* Horrid Novels, also uses the trope of the "child of sorrow," which Sadleir describes as an inheritance from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) that "persists like the Hapsburg nose through the family of Gothic romance."[59] Neill adds scornfully that all the Horrid Novels that draw on the literature of sensibility contain these "'children of sorrow,' whose sufferings make them more 'interesting'" within the novels but who read as "flat idealized characters" who "totter through the pages of their adventures, fainting, quivering, blushing, dropping tears on their fellow sufferers."[60] The contempt these critics show for children of sorrow may be a reaction against cliché, or it may be disgust for what would seem to be excessive expressions of emotion by modern literary standards, but it may also be an understandable abhorrence for a way of thinking that assumes that certain types of people are inherently deserving of "interest," or the concern of others.

The concept of interest was central to developing ideas about human nature and the treatment of others in the eighteenth century. Philosophers debated the degree to which benevolent actions or sympathetic feelings could be motivated by a concern for one's own personal benefit (self-interest), a lack of selfishness (disinterest), or a regard for societal well-being (public interest).[61] Routed through ideas about property ownership, *interesting* became important in literature of sensibility like Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768) as a word denoting emotional involvement. Unlike the detached, particular *interesting* that I will examine later, *Wolfenbach*'s *interesting* obliges

[59] Sadleir, "'All Horrid?'" 182.
[60] Neill, "'trash with which the press now groans,'" 178-179.
[61] For more on interest and sympathy, see Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

sensible people to involve themselves emotionally and materially in the welfare of strangers in need simply because they represent an abstract virtue or inhabit an identity or situation categorized as worthy of regard.

When the most important information a person can seek is an abstraction or category, details are inessential. Parsons describes a world in which a personal experience of affliction provides the wisdom necessary to quickly recognize and correctly respond to the situations of other sufferers. This recognition relies on the reading of visible character in faces, participating in the eighteenth-century belief that countenances reveal people's true nature.[62] Napier views this feature of *Wolfenbach* as evidence of its two-dimensional characterization,[63] but what can come across as simplistic writing is a necessary part of the novel's belief that long experience of suffering provides access to truths that can be recovered instantaneously through abstractions, categories, and sight.

Experiential and visual learning are necessary because, according to *Wolfenbach*, emotions cannot be expressed in words. As Santos points out, this frequent contention of the novel's can be read in terms of the convention of being overpowered by strong emotion, part of what Clery has described as gothic's inheritance from stage tragedy.[64] Distant from these tragic conventions, many readers today may find it frustrating that the novel repeatedly refuses to articulate its characters' feelings through dialogue, thought, or description of physical sensations, which many other gothic novels employ. While it is unclear whether Parsons's paucity of emotional description is conventional or merely

[62] For philosophical background, see Graeme Tytler, "Lavater and the Nineteenth-Century English Novel," in *The Faces of Physiognomy: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Johann Caspar Lavater*, ed. Ellis Shookman (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), 161-181.
[63] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 33.
[64] Santos, introduction, liv-lvi.

neglectful, it works as a necessary part of her curriculum, which appears even on the level of grammar in the novel. When Matilda explains to the Countess why she ran away from home, she relates the experience of overhearing her uncle's plans to rape her in her sleep. Notably, Matilda communicates her situation more than her reaction to the horrifying news: "Overwhelmed by my own reflections, without a friend or habitation to fly to for protection, uncertain whether this man was really my uncle or not, yet convinced he had the most diabolical designs against me, and that in his house I could not be safe: it is impossible to describe my feelings and distress."[65]

In this speech, she focuses on her vulnerable state, which, within *Wolfenbach*'s emotional curriculum, communicates information that is more important than specific feelings. She may appear only to be listing the aspects of her situation, but the substance and structure of this sentence do much to clarify her feelings in unparticularized terms, the texts of the school of affliction. As a precocious young student, Matilda is already able to parse her experience and communicate her woes as modifiers that accrue and ultimately dangle without attaching to her specifically. She foregrounds the conditions she inhabited: being upended by thoughts; being without allies, shelter, or defense; and lacking important knowledge while seeming to possess knowledge of her future harm that is nevertheless in the tentative realm of intentions. These conditions suggest her emotional state indirectly, and even grammatically, as they are modifiers that modify nothing, preceding not an expected final "I" statement but rather breaking off in a colon followed by the objective "it." Her general circumstances must stand in for the particular misery she is unable to express.

[65] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 14.

Many characters allege that some internal states defy words, but even the narrator concurs, which legitimizes the idea that it is pointless to attempt emotional description. When Matilda and her long-lost mother, the Countess Berniti, reunite, both the women and the narrator find themselves lacking language to capture the women's former grief and current joy:

> She dropped on her knees and lifted her hands and eyes to heaven, then again embraced her child, whose soft and tender emotions were too powerful to admit of speech, nor is it possible to describe the tumultuous joy of both for many minutes. The unhappy widow, the childless parent, dead to every hope of comfort, to embrace a child, adorned with every grace, to feel those delightful sensations to which her breast had been a stranger, and which mothers only can conceive,—a blessing so great, so unexpected, no language can describe. What then must be the feelings of Matilda, after suffering such a variety of sorrows, to find herself in the arms of a parent? O, sweet and undefinable emotions! when reciprocal between a mother and a child! who can speak the rapture of each tender bosom, when parental and filial love unites![66]

The categories of roles and situations are the main tools for expressing feelings in this passage, aside from the suggestive power of the repeated insistence that these feelings cannot be described. Matilda becomes "a child," and the Countess Berniti becomes "a mother" and "the unhappy widow, the childless parent." Even the situations themselves are abstracted. Parsons emphasizes the universal over the specific by using infinitives ("to embrace," "to feel," "to find") that rise above the conjugated, particularized situation. Similarly, the faltering, ecstatic sentence fragments, which express narrative emotion syntactically when words fail, focus attention on the nouns and away from pronouns. This differs significantly from today's grammar of emotion, which identifies a feeler with a feeling ("she was sad") or otherwise attaches the two ("my pain"). While these modern

[66] Eliza Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach: A German Story. In Two Volumes* (London: Minerva Press, 1793), vol. 2, 210-211. ECCO (ESTC T185360).

examples might appear to elevate the feeling just as much, they syntactically prioritize the pronoun, the person. The sentence with the clearest possessive in this passage, the one that ponders "the feelings of Matilda," syntactically prioritizes the emotions over the person, generalizes those emotions as the broad category of "feelings," and even declines to speculate about what they might be.

Even so, the situations in this passage do not subsume Matilda grammatically in the same way as the previous example. Strangely, the version of this passage in the 2007 edition of the novel omits a comma that the 1793 edition includes, so that the recent edition reads, "What then must be the feelings of Matilda after suffering such a variety of sorrows." [67] The modern edition states that it reproduces the 1793 version exactly, except for what the editors deem typographical errors, including "seemingly random and nonsensical commas."[68] This omitted comma is far from random, though, as it makes Matilda's temporal and experiential situation ("after suffering such a variety of sorrows") either restrictive (essential to the construction of meaning) or nonrestrictive (a clause that could be left out without changing the meaning of what it modifies). Thus, the recent version implies that the Matilda who has suffered is a changed Matilda—her situation has been absorbed into her identity. The original version implies that Matilda is not that closely identified with her circumstances, just as it refuses to state something like "she was sad." In the syntax of the Parsons's emotional curriculum, situations can supplant a person, but they cannot become subordinate or equal to her. In this happy moment, Matilda's travails remain, temporarily minimized but independent of her. It is the fact of these travails that

[67] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 185.
[68] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, xvii.

matter most in the novel's world—the relatable information, not the verbal expression of a sufferer's response to them, which is too personal to be expressed or sympathized with.

Indeed, words may be not only insufficient but also inappropriate, as suggested by a poem that Matilda finds scratched on the window of the room where the Countess of Wolfenbach was imprisoned by her husband after the murder of her lover and theft of her baby. The verse is necessarily brief, reading, "I am dumb, as solemn sorrow ought to be; / Could my griefs speak, my tale I'd tell to thee."[69] This passage of *Wolfenbach* is the one most often analyzed by scholars: Gillian Beer uses these lines as an example of the rhetorical force of incapacity,[70] Karen Morton asserts the effectiveness of the window poetry as a mediated articulation of grief,[71] and Angela Wright quotes another of the verses to illustrate the novel's powerful critique of marriage.[72] Deidre Shauna Lynch writes that when Matilda encounters this verse and others along with a handprint on the blood-stained floor of the room without knowing the Countess's history, the writing "accentuates the other disappearances that this site of inscription has witnessed . . . The unknownness of that hand and the inaccessibility of the backstory behind the words are arresting."[73]

It is important to note that it is this scene that has garnered the most favorable attention from scholars.[74] In addition to way the discovered poetry makes the scene

[69] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 29.
[70] Gillian Beer, "'Our unnatural No-voice': The Heroic Epistle, Pope, and Women's Gothic," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 12 (1982), 137, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3507402.
[71] Morton, *Life Marketed as Fiction*, 172-173.
[72] Angela Wright, "Disturbing the Female Gothic: An Excavation of the *Northanger* Novels," in *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, ed. Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 68.
[73] Deidre Shauna Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 232, ProQuest Ebrary.
[74] Though, admittedly, Robert Kiely implicitly criticizes this scene when praising Austen in *Northanger Abbey* for representing the remnants of Mrs. Tilney's death as "not a blood-stained dagger or a murky chamber, but an 'unoccupied' bed in a perfectly neat, ordinary, though empty room," adding, "in the world of Jane Austen, the best thing to do when one has nothing to say—that is, nothing which can add to the instruction or comfort of others—is

comparable to Radcliffe's more reputable work, this is one situation in the novel where Parsons's emotional writing can meet with approval from a modern audience, because the fact that Matilda encounters these words in writing, apart from the mysterious poet, removes the pressure of the fictional writer or the actual author to make some greater attempt at articulating emotion.[75] In the context of these disembodied, departicularized, ghostly words, we do not expect a modern articulation of physical sensation or precise emotion from the composer or the narrator, so in this instance the lack of information can be as effective for us as it always is for the inhabitants of Parsons's school of affliction. Many people today believe that the powerful and personal feelings that arise in response to extreme situations can never truly be explained to those outside that experience. In real life, we rarely expect someone who has lost a child to wrap up every feeling involved in that excruciating event and its aftermath in language and hand it to an uninvolved person. We are more likely to accept that the horrific nature of the circumstance makes the sufferer worthy of sympathy or aid even without knowing the details, and to believe that the feelings a person in that situation would experience are unimaginable, only knowable to those who have experienced the same event. In this way, Parsons's style more accurately reflects our current beliefs than our own fiction, which routinely enters experiential territory that its readers and even its authors have not traversed firsthand. In this rare moment in the Parsons's novel, our ethical convictions and aesthetic sensibilities are in accord with *Wolfenbach*'s school of affliction.

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not to lament the impotence of words, but to turn to subjects where they can be of some use." Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 130-131.

[75] Lynch even reads the inability of the verse to communicate as a way in which it speaks to the romantically constructed condition of poetry itself as neglected. Lynch, *Loving Literature*, 232.

Despite the inadequacy of language in Parsons's emotional curriculum, stories can supplement the firsthand experiences of suffering by educating the audience about the types and proportions of human misery. Soon after meeting Matilda, Mother Magdalene tells her, "Another time you shall know my sad story, and will then confess, of the two, I have been most wretched."[76] When she does elaborate on her various distresses, Mother Magdalene asks Matilda the seemingly rhetorical question, "[H]ave your troubles ever equalled mine?"[77] Mother Magdalene's storytelling helps teach Matilda how to measure and rank suffering, to subordinate her own troubles to the superior affliction of another. Though Santos argues that the stories in the novel perform a similar didactic function for readers, "as a mediating device that anticipates and regulates the reader's response to intense feeling,"[78] the form does not necessarily result in the intended effect. Napier, for example, criticizes the fact that the most dramatic moments in the novel reach the reader at a distance, through these stories of pain and woe, which she reads as the mistaken prioritizing of a moral message over vivid action.[79] Both these readings disregard the fact that apart from any intended or actual effect on a reader, within the world of the novel the stories themselves play their own essential role in plot and character development. Deidre Lynch writes that *Wolfenbach* (along with other gothic novels) elevates books as "essential props for its protagonists' projects of memory and mourning," as "the pages the characters behold are often conceptualized as their legacies, either familial or cultural."[80] and I would argue that in the case of oral stories in the novel, this phenomenon is doubly true. Over the

[76] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 141.
[77] Parsons, *Castle of Wolfenbach*, 148.
[78] Santos, introduction, lx.
[79] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 17.
[80] Lynch, *Loving Literature*, 204, 207.

course of the novel, Matilda gains wisdom and perspective in part by listening to several tales of woe. The climactic scene even focuses on the telling of a sad story, as Matilda's uncle slowly spins the tale of how he wronged her parents and deprived her of her birthright. The resolution of the novel consists not only of the typical restoration of Matilda's status, mother, and lover, but also, and essentially, her learning more of the story of suffering that shaped her life. It is a story that gives her identity, and it also completes the process of educating her about the extreme forms of affliction others experience, to the point where she can see her own troubles in the proper proportions taught by the school of affliction and become a more altruistic person.

Through all these messages and the techniques Parsons uses to convey them, the novel itself acts as its own school of affliction, with Parsons teaching her readers how to properly respond to her stories of suffering. The novel's frequent assertions that emotions are indescribable mark off the narrative territory that the novel will not cover and attempts to recalibrate readers' expectations, if they are not already primed to read incapacity for speech as a sign of deep feeling. Instead of attempting to enter into the particulars of her characters' feelings, Parsons encourages her readers to learn a culturally appropriate response to these types of situations—one that she models in the novel through her listening characters. Santos's observation about the modeling of sympathetic response in the novel is correct as far as the intention built into the convention, if not correct about its actual effect on all readers. However, an essential part of this modeling is the way Parsons's listening characters do not make a sympathetic response conditional to details; the telling and hearing of stories is not only conventional in itself but also conventional in its reliance on types alone for effect. In responding to Matilda's story of evading her lustful uncle, the

Countess of Wolfenbach is a perceptive and experienced reader who recognizes the character type of the damsel in distress and responds with the expected attention and sympathy. As these scenes in which a sufferer relates her sad story and a listener responds with compassion recur, Parsons uses repetition to teach her readers how to recognize generic categories and respond appropriately—to feel with the formula.

Feeling Against the Formula

Whereas *The Castle of Wolfenbach* represents a school of affliction that teaches a method of feeling with the formula of stories of suffering, its reception teaches a method of feeling against that formula. This is a different kind of literary emotional training, but one that still teaches that we do not need to know particulars in order to respond correctly. As I discussed in the first section of this chapter, eighteenth-century discourse about novels, and especially Minerva novels, created an atmosphere in which a work like *Wolfenbach* could be perceived as a part of a broader threat—one of a mass of new gothic fiction that appeared to cater to a public appetite for extreme emotion and to dull readers' powers of aesthetic discrimination, and even, some feared, to encourage immoral behavior by portraying vice. Eighteenth-century critics considered Parsons's writing to be somewhat better than most of the novels published during the growth of disreputable circulating libraries, and publishers reprinted it until the mid-nineteenth century in editions alongside reputable novels, but after this time it was forgotten. By the twentieth century, scholars knew *Wolfenbach* only as one of *Northanger Abbey*'s Horrid Novels, a label that implies it is both exhilarating and bad. It is this latter quality that scholars and amateur critics tend to

focus on when they approach *Wolfenbach* through *Northanger*, and they often treat Jane Austen as a model for how to condescend to the emotional and aesthetic excesses of *Wolfenbach* and other novels of its kind.

Scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries rarely mention *Wolfenbach* apart from its context as a *Northanger* Horrid Novel. In this context, scholars sometimes characterize Austen as a book critic who uses *Northanger* as a venue for teaching her readers to discriminate between Ann Radcliffe's worthwhile gothic novels and her imitators, including Eliza Parsons. For example, Bette Roberts argues that the list of seven novels that Isabella recommends to Catherine "enumerates the negative extremes to which the reader may contrast what Austen considers to be higher expressions of the Gothic in the notably superior novels of Ann Radcliffe."[81] These novels fall far short of Radcliffe, Roberts explains, because although they "pretend" to advocate for morality, rationality, and self-improvement, the "disastrous stories" they include are not truly meant for edification of the "already perfect" characters but merely to "appeal to the readers' emotions."[82] This critique overlooks the way that in *Wolfenbach*, Matilda demonstrates her growth not only by gaining her identity through the disastrous story that relates to her origins but also through learning to subordinate her own disasters to those of others and access universal wisdom.

Other scholars have argued that Austen's novel teaches not only proper literary taste but also life lessons through aesthetic means. Robert Kiely demonstrates how Henry Tilney challenges Catherine's indiscriminate usage of words as a means to enable her to

[81] Roberts, "Horrid Novels," 90.
[82] Roberts, "Horrid Novels," 90-91. Neill similarly argues that Austen "foregrounds the pseudo-didacticism of popular Gothic fiction" as well as female Quixote stories. Neill, "'trash with which the press now groans,'" 184.

transcend her own naïve perspective and exercise better judgment of people and situations, similar to how I argue Parsons uses stories of suffering in *Wolfenbach*.[83] For Kiely, however, Austen's un-gothic restraint and distinction are the key pedagogical tools, as he finds that "as a display of the disciplined mind and the well-chosen word [*Northanger Abbey*] does more than all the hysterical criticism of the periodicals to deflate some of the poses and excesses of Romanticism."[84] Jacqueline Howard argues that Kiely's reading misses the ways that Austen not only ridicules gothic novels but also skewers the criticism of novels, making Henry an object of critique by styling his instruction as the masculine condescension "of those authoritative, male-authored pronouncements addressed to young women in conduct books and reviews."[85]

Kiely's analysis is the sort of scholarship on Jane Austen that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes as being sadistically concerned with "the spectacle of a Girl Being Taught a Lesson."[86] This critical fascination with the way Austen's protagonists become chastened by experience has likely placed even more emphasis than Austen does on the problematic reading habits of the young *Northanger* women, underscoring the idea that *Wolfenbach* and the other Horrid Novels are pleasures that should not be indulged. *Wolfenbach*'s own pedagogical narrative appears to register as insufficiently harsh to these scholars, perhaps because Matilda does not experience the kind of shame that Catherine does when she gains perspective on her youthful feelings, or perhaps because Parsons herself indulges in too many aesthetic and emotional excesses in *Wolfenbach*.

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[83] Kiely, *Romantic Novel in England*, 126-129.
[84] Kiely, *Romantic Novel in England*, 134-135.
[85] Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 172.
[86] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 833, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343745.

Emotional involvement of the sort that *Wolfenbach* portrays and encourages appears to some scholars as the fault that Austen intends to educate readers out of with *Northanger*. Claudia Johnson claims that *Northanger* "does not ridicule gothic novels nearly as much as their readers."[87] She argues that Austen makes both Catherine and Henry out to be bad readers of gothic novels—one for seeing them as true life and the other for seeing them as mere entertainment, when the reality is that they are somewhere in between. Ultimately, she writes, Austen encourages her own readers to approach both fiction and society "with critical detachment."[88] Natalie Neill also emphasizes the value of critical distance in *Northanger*, arguing that this is the skill Catherine needs to learn, and that Austen prompts readers "to assume a detached critical relationship" with her own novel.[89]

In different ways, all of these scholars interpret *Northanger* as a sort of textbook that teaches professional reading. Just as Catherine learns to discriminate, attend to context, and become less emotionally involved, so do attentive readers of Austen, they argue. These techniques allow for a detached, scholarly interest—one that is different from the unconditionally involved interest Parsons models in *Wolfenbach*, and which I will examine more fully in the final section of this chapter. What these readings of *Northanger* do, even when they argue for the value of gothic fiction within Austen's text, is use Austen's gothic parody to delineate developmental hierarchies of reading and writing and imply that they correspond to mature perception, feeling, and action in everyday life. Within these hierarchies, Parsons's *Wolfenbach* and the other Horrid Novels are positioned as immature—aesthetically unrefined, morally indiscriminate, and emotionally inappropriate.

[87] Johnson, Claudia L. *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 34.
[88] Johnson, *Jane Austen*, 48.
[89] Neill, "'trash with which the press now groans,'" 185.

Northanger and its criticism thus work together to teach ways of condescending to novels like *Wolfenbach*, making it likely that readers who come to Parsons's novel through Austen or Austen scholarship will be aware that in reading one of the Horrid Novels, they are reading a work that they ought to think is bad, and that its badness can serve as model for what not to write, read, feel, or do.

For nonprofessional readers, this awareness may result in readings that resist the emotional immersion that Parsons encourages, but it does not necessarily result in cold condemnation. Despite or because of being dismissed and recommended as "horrid" and puerile by *Northanger* and its criticism, *Wolfenbach* continues to be read and reviewed by amateur critics. As the first named and first published of the seven Horrid Novels, it is the most reviewed on sites like Goodreads and Amazon, and it is the one most thoroughly covered on blogs. The most striking trend in online commentary on the novel is emotional didacticism. In expressing their responses to the novel, amateur reviewers often adopt an authoritative tone and teach other readers how they ought to feel about the work. This instruction often recommends paying attention to formula more than detail, much like Parsons's own attention to categories in expressions of emotion. Modern amateur critics, though, like scholars, suggest that every aspect of the novel, emotion included, is equally typical.

Parsons's repetition of sad stories, which seems intended to train her readers to recognize them as emotional conventions and respond appropriately, appears to backfire with modern readers. While a reader who has spent time inhabiting Parsons's school of affliction and studying the beliefs that support its literary-emotional conventions could have the conditioning necessary to feel with the formula of these repetitious emotional

displays, recent reviewers treat them as just another genre cliché. One blogger asks, "How do you know when you're reading a gothic novel? Characters faint then weep, and then faint some more and then someone comes to their rescue."[90] Another writes, "The story speeds along, packed with tales of woe, heroes and villains, titles and society, swooning and fainting, weeping and wailing, swooning and fainting."[91] On Goodreads, a reviewer writes that "Eliza Parsons included damsels in distress, swooning and fainting, weeping and wailing, incest, murder, kidnapping, a haunted castle . . ."[92] In keeping with the codified, disdainful language used for literary clichés, these reviews echo each other when mentioning emotional conventions; this is especially striking in the repetition of "swooning and fainting, weeping and wailing" in the last two examples, as if reviewers are actually supplying each other with the exact language with which to critique the conventions of the novel. This echoing recalls the way Matilda learns to speak in the aphorisms of her mentors by the end of the story, but if these reviews provide education in the recognition of and response to emotional categories, it is far from the kind that Matilda learns.

In each of these examples, the reviewer includes the emotional conventions (the ways the characters express emotion, like weeping or fainting) alongside genre conventions of plot, character, or setting (a hero saving a damsel in distress, a haunted castle). It seems as if, due to different literary-emotional training, today's readers see the cues for feeling as simply conventions. The first review of *Wolfenbach*, from 1794, provides a good comparison to this, as the writer inserts an emotional response in the midst of a list

[90] Justbookreading, "Review—The Castle of Wolfenbach," Just Book Reading, December 9, 2011, https://justbookreading.com/2011/12/09/review-the-castle-of-wolfenbach/.
[91] Fleur in her World, "Castle of Wolfenbach by Eliza Parsons," Fleur in her World, February 18, 2009, https://fleurinherworld.com/2009/02/18/castle-of-wolfenbach-by-eliza-parsons/.
[92] Keith, review of *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, by Eliza Parsons, Goodreads, November 24, 2013, https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/772966972?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1.

of plot events: "he [Matilda's uncle] also discloses the measure of his crimes; restores her [Matilda] to her mother, from whom he had likewise taken her when an infant (the recognition here is affecting) and burying himself in a convent . . ."[93] Though this writer also places emotion alongside other literary features, he phrases the plot in specifics while making the emotion general and even minimizing it in parenthesis. This eighteenth-century professional critic suggests through his sentence structure that his own emotional response has a subordinate place in a review, as a sort of embarrassed aside that interrupts the real work of relating the situations from the novel in detail. He carefully elucidates the circumstances in the novel while minimizing a personal emotional response to those circumstances, implying, like Parsons, that situations are more relevant than personal feelings to well-trained audiences of stories of suffering. In contrast, the modern amateur critics generalize about every aspect of the novel, making both situations and emotions unimportant. The earlier review and the later ones judge *Wolfenbach* as inferior to good novels, but they model different forms of judgment. Parsons's contemporary makes distinctions, detailing the plot, separating plot summary from emotional response, and characterizing the work as not "one of the first order, or even of the second" but possessing "sufficient interest" to command some degree of engagement.[94] The online reviewers quoted here have inherited the critical tendency to flatten distinctions among formulaic gothic works that began in the decade of *Wolfenbach*'s publication (for example, the gothic "recipes" mentioned earlier) and was likely enhanced by the pedagogical dimensions of *Northanger* and its scholarship.

[93] *Critical Review*, 50.
[94] *Critical, Wolfenbach,* 50.

Going beyond the modeling of conventional disdain that the amateur critics above demonstrate, some of the online commentary about *Wolfenbach* is explicitly emotionally didactic, but rather than employing categorical thinking to achieve sympathy, as Parsons does, this emotional education uses categorical thinking to achieve amusement. This trend is especially obvious in blog entries and comments from the Gothic Lit Classics Circuit Tour of October 2011 (which may be responsible for some of *Wolfenbach*'s prevalence in amateur reviews in comparison to other Horrid Novels). The blog The Classics Circuit would post a list of books and brief descriptions of them annually, and other bloggers would commit to posting about those books on certain dates. Chris from Chrisbookarama was one of the bloggers who participated in the Classics Circuit Tour, and the way in which she instructs her audience on how to emotionally approach the novel is particularly influential for her "students." After mocking the novel, she writes, "I'm giving you the impression that I didn't like *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and that's not true. I LOVED it. It was so bad it was good [. . .] as long as you don't take *The Castle of Wolfenbach* too seriously you'll enjoy it."[95] This characterization and advice seems to have struck a chord with her readers, who quote or paraphrase her in their comments on her post: "I think I could like this one for the 'so bad it's good' factor!" "[M]aybe I'll give it a try sometime when I'm looking for something funnily bad!" "I totally agree--it's so bad it's good." "I love the fact that it's so bad it's good." One of Chris's readers ended up reviewing the novel on a blog as well. This blogger writes, "I picked up *The Castle of Wolfenbach* after Chris at Chrisbookarama reviewed it. She described it as essentially being so bad it was good [. . .]

[95] Chris, "The Castle of Wolfenbach by Eliza Parsons: Review," Chrisbookarama, http://www.chrisbookarama.com/2011/10/castle-of-wolfenbach-by-eliza-parsons.html.

honestly, I had a good time with it. I've never read a book with so much fainting and weeping before and all of it amused me."[96]

The most didactic exchange about *Wolfenbach* that I found was a "tutored read" on Librarything, in which a reader with some expertise provides context as another reader works through the novel. The tutor of this particular read, in addition to educating her "student" on eighteenth-century culture and gothic conventions, also educates the reader on how to enjoy the novel, by advising her student to count the number of times a female character bursts into tears. They both continue to mockingly quote these dramatic passages.[97] It is worth noting that ironically tracking weeping in novels is not a twentieth- or twenty-first-century phenomenon. Henry Morley famously edited an edition of Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* in 1886 that included an "Index to Tears" for the amusement of a Victorian audience distant from the conventions of eighteenth-century sensibility.[98] Many of these amateur critics, however, go further than offering humorous commentary on the novel by instructing their community of readers on how to feel.

The kind of emotional curriculum shown in the "so bad it's good" blog post and comments or the LibraryThing exchange, while teaching to feel against the formula of *Wolfenbach*, is still feeling—but substituting pleasure for pity. Scholars generally do not express pleasure in what they present as failed writing—pleasure for scholars is most expressible in terms of interest, as I will discuss in the following section. As scholars, we value critical emotion—emotion that requires labor, or specialized taste, or that resists what appear to be the intended emotions of the work—more than feeling with the formula,

[96] Justbookreading, "Review."
[97] "Castle Of Wolfenbach by Eliza Parsons - lyzard tutoring SqueakyChu," LibraryThing, November-December 2013, https://www.librarything.com/topic/161142.
[98] Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, ed. Henry Morley (London: Cassell, 1886 [1771]), vi-vii.

which, when it lines up with the intended emotions, appears passive, naïve, and boring. Nonprofessional reviewers are not sanctioned by their community for enjoying formulaic fiction, but when a novel like *Wolfenbach* comes prejudged as "horrid" and unsophisticated, they may be less inclined to express simple enjoyment, even as they are also disinclined to aloofly dismiss it. By modeling for other readers how to enjoy what they call bad writing, they teach a way of valuing formula that incorporates critical judgment, even if it favors categorical responses over careful discernment—which, as I will demonstrate in the next section, is not entirely without its own categorical tendencies.

Conditional Interest

Even if scholars believe that *The Castle of Wolfenbach* possesses no engaging qualities in and of itself, they may express their engagement with the project of literary recovery that it allows. Deidre Lynch, writing about scholarly affects, describes the "pleasures of laboriously recovered, recondite information" that literary historicism allows.[99] Devendra Varma mentions this feeling in his introduction to The Northanger Set of Jane Austen's Horrid Novels in 1968, when *Wolfenbach* had been out of print for more than a century. He writes, "[T]his piece of research has brought to me many moments of delight and given me the thrill and pleasure of literary archaeology."[100] At that time, Varma was one of only a handful of modern scholars to assess *Wolfenbach* and the other Horrid Novels, and the opportunity he had to help bring the books back into print and inform modern readers about the authors and works that played a large role in Jane Austen's novel is one that few

[99] Lynch, *Loving Literature*, 77.
[100] Devendra P. Varma, introduction to *The Castle of Wolfenbach* by Eliza Parsons (London: Folio Press, 1968), ix.

scholars today ever get to experience the like of. Diane Long Hoeveler was in a comparable position in 2006 when she wrote the introduction to the first major edition of *Wolfenbach* since Varma's, and she makes a similar statement, though a less fervent one. She writes, "In a decade that saw the fall of a King and the rise of Emperor Napoleon, this novel spoke about the attraction and allure of France and the French people to the British bourgeois imaginary. Unpacking that allure even today is an engaging exercise in literary archaeology."[101] The pleasures of literary archaeology are difficult to share with others—Varma's is for him alone, and Hoeveler's is for readers with a strong background in history. Thus, scholars expressing the joys of recovery work with *Wolfenbach* are not likely to transmit their enjoyment to others, but they may transmit their less positive attitudes.

The attitudes scholars express are important because the authoritative nature of scholarly discourse could influence other readers, instructing those readers on how a text ought to be approached. Rita Felski writes that "the authority of critique is often conveyed implicitly . . . via inflexions of manner and mood, timbre and tone."[102] A critical mood spreads because, she explains, "the student learns by imitating the teacher, adopting similar techniques of reading and reasoning, learning to emulate a style of thought," which includes attending to "displayed dispositions" and "*emulation of both tone and technique*."[103] This emulation becomes apparent in the way several amateur reviewers paraphrase Hoeveler's introduction to the modern edition, repeating her assertion that the novel is important as a window into history. While they endorse her interest, they also copy her condescension. Hoeveler shows disdain for Parsons's tendency to seem "blatantly

[101] Hoeveler, introduction, xiv.
[102] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 24.
[103] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 26, emphasis hers.

nationalistic in her celebration of British superiority" and writes that in her "bourgeois agenda" Parsons "goes so far as to say in this novel that middle-class people are more attractive than aristocrats because they do not stay out late at night partying, drinking, and losing their looks."[104] Similarly, a reviewer on Goodreads expresses patronizing amusement when noting, "The book also has a very strong patriotic bent and wouldn't you know it, England is the best country in the world" and "If [. . .] the rich gave up late nights and gambling, there would be nothing to improve."[105] Of course, readers possess agency in how they respond to any novel, but we cannot discount the fact that scholarly experts act as teachers, especially in their introductions to novels. When these teachers introduce the uninitiated to a novel like *Wolfenbach*, they draw readers' attention to certain features, and they encourage certain kinds of responses. In *Wolfenbach*'s case, these responses tend to be ironic or disdainful.

Even when scholars and publishers recover a novel, they often suggest it is important but not good, or that it is important only because others have dismissed it. *The Castle of Wolfenbach* went out of print after its 1968 publication as part of The Northanger Set of Jane Austen's Horrid Novels, but after Rictor Norton included an excerpt of it in his 2000 book *Gothic Readings*, fringe publishers began to show renewed interest in Parsons's novel. Norton introduces the excerpt with some details of Parsons's tragic life, a description of her novels as derivate of Radcliffe's, and a quotation from one of the novel's early reviews that complains about its unmet expectations.[106] Even this lukewarm

[104] Hoeveler, introduction, ix.
[105] Dawn, review of *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, by Eliza Parsons, Goodreads, December 13, 2014, http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1130969980.
[106] Rictor Norton, ed., *Gothic Readings: The First Wave, 1764-1840* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000; 2006), 46.

reintroduction of *Wolfenbach* could have caught the attention of publishers and scholars who work with culturally devalued fiction. In 2003 Wildside Press, which produces mostly science fiction and is thus experienced in dealing with literature of precarious cultural value, published an edition without an introduction that is now out of print. In 2006, Valancourt Books, whose mission is to recover neglected fiction, released an inexpensive paperback with a scholarly introduction by Hoeveler, followed by a reprint in 2007 and ebook in 2009, as part of an effort to republish all of the Horrid Novels with scholarly introductions. Today, electronic versions are readily accessible, including one with a lengthy scholarly introduction by The Northanger Library Project, whose purpose is also the recuperation of dismissed fiction. These publications, like recent scholarly work on the other Horrid Novels, attempt to reassess these works with the assumption that previous recovery workers (like Michael Sadleir, Montague Summers, and Varma) were still too hasty to judge. Yet, by continuing to assert *Wolfenbach*'s importance only as a novel mentioned by Jane Austen or as a novel that has been neglected, publishers and scholars spread awareness of the novel while disseminating what is likely only an ambivalent interest in it.

Similarly, *Wolfenbach*'s scholarly recuperation as a "female gothic" novel makes interest in the novel conditional on the way it is perceived to be working in the Radcliffean mode and the extent to which it alters Radcliffe's prototype in its depiction of female oppression. Scholars reading *Wolfenbach* through a female gothic lens have pointed out that Parsons, unlike Radcliffe, makes violence against women gruesomely apparent in the text, but they do so by marking this difference as a single variation in an otherwise typical imitation. Angela Wright prefaces her claim about this explicit violence with "Where

Parsons deviates from the Radcliffean model, however," and Sue Chaplin argues that Parsons's plots are "very much in the Radcliffean mould, but what distinguishes Parsons from her predecessor" is the graphic nature of the descriptions.[107] Karen Morton instead argues that Parsons's gothic novels resist Radcliffe's model, in part by portraying more realistic characters and situations, but even this argument necessitates constant comparison to Radcliffe, making interest in Parsons contingent on her relationship to a more well-regarded novelist.[108]

This contingent interest, with its attendant valuation of particularity, can help reveal the distance between the investments of a novel like *The Castle of Wolfenbach* and the investments of critics today. The cultural trend of recovering, reassessing, and revaluing popular older novels by women has not generally led scholars to argue that *Wolfenbach* is effectively written or complex. It is still extremely rare for them to approach *Wolfenbach* as anything but one of the Horrid Novels, for which it receives passing mention. As E. J. Clery writes, novels like *Wolfenbach* seem "already read" because they are formulaic.[109] The fact that *Wolfenbach* and other early gothic novels were plentiful, formulaic, and sensational has served historically as justification for describing them as indistinguishable media for feeling, rarely worthy of close, particular attention. By and large, scholars seem to pass the novel over as one among many of its kind, with nothing interesting to offer. They rarely make a strong case for the novel meriting attention on its own terms. Hoeveler represents many scholars' attitude toward *Wolfenbach* well in statement that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter: "I would not claim it is a great novel. Instead, I see it as a historical

[107] Wright, "Disturbing the Female Gothic," 67; Chaplin, "Female Gothic and the Law," 142.
[108] Morton, *Life Marketed as Fiction*.
[109] Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 99.

document that speaks to us about the fears, beliefs, and prejudices of its era. As such it is an interesting text to study in relation to other gothic, sentimental, and melodramatic works of the 1790s."[110]

Hoeveler's tentative assertion that the novel is interesting perfectly illustrates Sianne Ngai's argument that the word *interesting* offers a compromise in the conflict over whether a critic's role should be to judge works aesthetically or dispense with aesthetic judgments entirely. Ngai writes that *interesting* "keeps the possibility alive that a critic might actually continue the task of influencing public judgment, if only in the modest way of suggesting that some texts are more worth paying attention to than others and then supplying reasons why."[111] In this way, as Ngai explains, there is "a deeply pedagogical dimension to the interesting," as venturing this assessment often requires the critic to inform her audience and engage in a discussion with the intention of not only convincing but also illuminating.[112] Calling something interesting can be a way of opening critical space for a previously dismissed text. In contrast to aesthetic judgments that purport to be instantaneous, final, and universal (like *beautiful*), Ngai argues that *interesting* entails consideration and reconsideration, as it assumes an always-shifting point of personal knowledge. A work of art can be bad but still worthy of lengthy attention, Ngai explains, because it offers information the audience does not yet have.

However, the affective dimensions of *interesting* complicate its usefulness as a way to reassess works like *Wolfenbach*. Ngai describes interest as both affective and conceptual, a mostly detached engagement, and one that can easily tip into boredom or frustration.

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[110] Hoeveler, introduction, xiv.
[111] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 171.
[112] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 171.

Gothic novels like *Wolfenbach* have been framed as intense (though ephemeral) emotional experiences, with an "already read" derivative quality. A reader expecting an intense emotional experience will likely find cold comfort in mere interest, and a reader predisposed to see only formula will be unlikely to search very hard for novelty. Scholars have a lot of incentive to find a book like *Wolfenbach* interesting, so they may be frustrated by the effort it takes, finding that a strenuous attempt to be interested yields only the rather unsatisfying (for me at least) option of being interested for the sake of the novel's role in history alone, or that it requires a laborious reframing of the terms on which we judge the novel. I sidestep both of these endeavors in this chapter by attempting to occupy *Wolfenbach*'s world and our own critical climate at the same time, in order to illuminate the novel's cultural investments and set them against our own.

The differences among *Wolfenbach*'s values and our own seem too numerous to catalogue, but we have already seen the most important ones emerge in recent negative assessments of Parsons's prescriptive morality, universality, and conventionality, which highlight our own beliefs in relativism, specificity, and individuality. These values resurface in the different uses of the word *interesting*. According to Ngai, people are interested when they do not know something, while for Parsons, interest may involve not knowing, but it is also often determined by whether something fits into known categories. Ngai's interest is individual and particular, always changing based on a given person's knowledge at the time, and ambivalent in its emotional engagement, while Parsons's is normative and unquestionably emotionally involved.

These differences make it appear as though Parsons's school of affliction is the only rigidly prescriptive one, but we have seen that what appear to be independent assessments

of a novel like *Wolfenbach* actually look more like emotional rules that are passed down over time when considered together. Even a scholar like Ngai, who seems to be an independent auditor of the kinds of critics who establish emotional rules, inhabits an affective school in which she participates in the lessons. As she elaborates on the semiotics of *interesting*, what is for the most part a descriptive argument becomes sometimes indistinguishable from a prescriptive one. After using the definitions of authorities to break *interesting* into its components, like time and novelty, she then turns to examples and presents them as situations in which the particular combination of components means that there is only one appropriate response or range of responses. For example, when describing Ed Ruscha's books of photographs of ordinary subjects (like *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*), she writes, "Given the banality of the subject matter and the calculated distances at which the examples of each type were photographed (for an overall effect of technical 'neutrality'), these generic-looking compilations were clearly engineered to keep affect on a low burner, generating at most tiny flickers of interest."[113] By linking the response to the objective components of interesting/boring that she has already established and to the artist's intention and even the construction of the art, she excludes any possibility for meaningful variation in response, as if any such variations would be incorrect.

Within a critical culture shaped by implicit affective rules like these, a reader who broadcasts her sympathetic response to a novel like *Wolfenbach* risks being judged as unsophisticated or self-righteous. I hope I escape both of these judgments by arguing that a sympathetic response to *Wolfenbach*, like my own, is not entirely different from the aforementioned critical responses. While scholars privilege educated and difficult reading

[113] Ngai, *Aesthetic*, 147.

experiences, in the case of eighteenth-century formulaic gothic fiction that abounds with tales of distress, it takes as much effort, cultivation of a specific taste, and resistance to the dominant critical attitude to become absorbed in the novel in a way similar to what lay readers in the 1790s might have when they made *Wolfenbach* and other circulating-library fiction popular. When I read *Wolfenbach* for the first time, I read it with a taste for melodrama and sentiment honed by years of reading early eighteenth-century British amatory fiction, midcentury novels of sensibility, and early gothic novels, as well as American emotional literature, from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *Twilight*. This reading practice and preference allowed me to immerse myself in the story and experience sometimes wrenching agony at the characters' woes, especially when those woes were ones I could not bear to imagine experiencing. I also read *Wolfenbach* for the first time on an e-reader, like many of amateur critics note that they did, and even this new medium could have hugely affected the way I approached the novel, as scholars are beginning to consider.[114] Even so, as a reader aware of the critical conversation about novels like *Wolfenbach*, I was continually conscious of how I ought to judge its formulaic qualities, and it took considerable effort to remain engaged in the story. In this way, some experiences of absorption in bad writing can be as difficult as some experiences of scholarly distance, just as some dismissive critical judgments of it can be as easy as some uncritical acceptance.

The way in which our critical judgments of emotion conform to cultural standards is difficult to see because, like good students, we have internalized these standards. Parsons's school of affliction is only visible to us in the aspects that differ from our own beliefs and conventions. Likewise, our school of critical emotion is most visible in these differences. We

[114] See, for example, Yung-Hsing Wu, "Kindling, Disappearing, Reading," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (2013), http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/7/1/000115/000115.html.

have our own rules that dictate the proper way to express suffering in fiction, but they are most apparent when they are broken by "horrid" fiction like *Wolfenbach*. We have learned a very limited number of ways we are supposed to respond emotionally to bad fiction as critics, but these limitations only feel constricting when we see the force of the critical tradition that upholds them. Our emotional conventions change greatly over time, but in any given cultural moment they have the doctrinal solidity of a schoolhouse, and only when we recognize that other people in other times and places occupied different schools can we have the option of stepping outside our own.

CHAPTER 2

Shock Treatments: Sensation and Constraint in, around, and beyond *The Monk*

> The sufferings which he describes are so frightful and intolerable, that we break with abruptness from the delusion, and indignantly suspect the man of a species of brutality, who could find a pleasure in wantonly imagining them; and the abominations which he pourtrays with no hurrying pencil, are such as the observation of character by no means demanded, such as 'no observation of character can justify, because no good man would willingly suffer them to pass, however transiently, through his own mind.'
> —Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Critical Review*

> Then came Matthew Lewis, the genre's first punk, the Johnny Rotten of the Gothic novel. *The Monk* was a black engine of sex and the supernatural that changed the genre—and the novel itself—forever. There has never been anything quite like it. At this writing, the book is over two hundred years old and still explosive.—Stephen King, introduction

Coleridge's appalled judgment above is typical of the contemporary response to *The Monk*. The novel's salacious sensationalism made it infamous after its publication in 1796, especially once the public knew that the author was Matthew Lewis, a young member of Parliament. But as we can see, the deviant brutality and pleasure that Coleridge denounces in 1797 becomes, for King in 2002, the explosive material of a swaggering rebel, something only the most uptight readers would shun. Even as early as 1957, Devendra Varma would reflect on the scandalized early reception of the novel, "To us it seems ineffably puerile that anyone could be disturbed by these mild erotics. But, immediately, the prigs and prudes rose up."[1] Today, *The Monk*'s transgressive subjects and stylistic power make it laudable, in contrast to Eliza Parsons's "horrid" *Castle of Wolfenbach* from my previous chapter.

[1] Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (London: Arthur Barker, Ltd., 1957), 147.

Amateur critics now label Parsons's novel "so bad it's good" because of its sentimental conventions, but Lewis's novel has become a "good" bad novel—bold, unruly, and virile, as we might expect from a work that came to be known as the epitome of the "male gothic" subgenre. Online reviews of *The Monk* praise its sensational sex scenes, murders, and even rape, and academic criticism of the last four decades often discusses control, heterosexual male voyeurism, and violence against women in the novel while minimizing its sentimentality.

Though I separate sentimentality and sensationalism in this chapter, I am aware that the historical and textual construction of sentiment and sensation are complex and sometimes intersecting. Eighteenth-century definitions of the terms *sentiment* and *sensation* sometimes overlap, especially when they converge in novels of sensibility.[2] Stephen Ahern describes these affective styles as points on the continuum of the rhetoric of sensibility, as repeatedly in early fictional forms "a representational mode preoccupied with pathos moves from sentimentality to increasing sensationalism," revealing "a drive to represent ever more extreme forms of excess, as if writers of sensibility narratives needed to satisfy their readers' desire for perpetual novelty."[3] For the purposes of this chapter, I am using both terms similarly to how twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics have employed them when dismissing representations of feeling in novels—dismissals informed by not only eighteenth-century works but also nineteenth-century American sentimental novels, Victorian sensation fiction, sentimental soap operas, and sensationalized news

[2] On the eighteenth-century construction of sentiment, sensation, and sensibility, including its gendering, see G. J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility*, John Mullan's *Sentiment and Sociability*, and Ann Jessie Van Sant's *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel*.

[3] Stephen Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities: Romantic Excess and the Genealogy of the Novel, 1680-1810* (Brooklyn, AMS Press, 2007), 33.

media, among many other cultural influences.[4] I will use *sentiment* when alluding to the conventions of emotional expression that critics have characterized as overblown, false, and clichéd. Philosopher Deborah Knight, in her examination of aesthetic treatments of sentiment, contends that the negative implications of the term itself can lead to "the prejudice of treating everything that could . . . be called sentimental as simply unworthy of further aesthetic consideration."[5] I will use *sensation* when referencing plot elements that critics have described as prurient or gratuitously shocking, such as descriptions of sex or violence. Pamela Gilbert writes that Victorian sensation fiction, which inherited many of gothic fiction's conventions, "was thought to appeal directly to the 'nerves,' eliciting a physical sensation with its surprises, plot twists, and startling revelations . . . It was thought to be written and read quickly rather than discerningly; a 'mass-produced,' disposable consumer product."[6] The sensational aspects of the plot, which I will briefly summarize before beginning to sketch the argument of this chapter, are the ones that dominate critical accounts of feeling in the novel and present the most obvious critical challenges.

[4] See Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs* on American sentimental fiction, Ann Cvetkovich's *Mixed Feelings* on Victorian sensation fiction, David B. Sachsman and David W. Bulla's collection *Sensation* on nineteenth-century news. Robyn Warhol's *Having a Good Cry* discusses embodied response and gendering in relation to mainstream culture of the British and American nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Warhol writes that the "antieffeminate" or masculinized opposite of what is commonly conceived as effeminate sentimental response ("the tightness of the throat and the wetness of the eye that presage crying") would be "the pounding heart, the quick breathing, and the mild sweating" of thrilling genres. Robyn R. Warhol, *Having a Good Cry: Effeminate Feelings and Pop-Culture Forms* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003), 89.

[5] Deborah Knight, "Why We Enjoy Condemning Sentimentality: A Meta-Aesthetic Perspective," the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 419, http://www.jstor.org/stable/432148.

[6] In literary studies, most discussions of sensational form center on Victorian sensation fiction, though scholars often mention sensation novels' gothic inheritance. This genre was associated with female writers and readers and is bound up in Victorian culture in specific ways, but some aspects of its affective qualities and critical reception are common to sensational gothic fiction in the eighteenth century and to a broad range of twentieth-century mass-market genre novels. Gilbert writes that Victorian critics were "censorious of its 'low' appeal to physical appetites for 'sensations' whether erotic or pleasurably horrifying, its questionable morality, and inadequate or inappropriate style." Pamela K. Gilbert, Introduction, in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. Pamela K. Gilbert (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2011), 2.

The Monk features two intertwined plotlines: one that follows the gradual corruption of a holy man and one that narrates the adventures of two young people in love. It is the first of these, the main plot, that I will be concentrating on most in this chapter, since this is the storyline that has garnered the most critical attention. This plot tells the tale of Ambrosio, who begins the novel as a monk with an impeccable reputation who, raised by the Church, has devoted his life to pious pursuits. Early in the novel, Ambrosio reports a pregnant nun, Agnes, which leads to her harsh and gruesome punishment. Soon after condemning Agnes, Ambrosio learns that his friend Rosario is not a fellow monk but a woman named Matilda (later revealed to be a demon), who prevents him from reporting her too by threatening to stab herself in the heart. Though Ambrosio attempts to remain virtuous, Matilda soon initiates him into the pleasures of the flesh, a sin that Ambrosio quickly follows with others. Ambrosio, newly awakened to his sexual urges, becomes obsessed with an innocent young woman named Antonia (who turns out to be his sister). With Matilda's encouragement, he makes two unsuccessful attempts to rape her and is prevented both times by Elvira, her mother (and his, as he learns too late). After the second attempt, he murders Elvira to keep her from exposing him. As news of Agnes's fate ignites mob vengeance, Ambrosio retreats into the catacombs with Antonia, whom he has drugged, and eventually rapes and murders her. When he is caught, he faces the judgment of the Inquisition and chooses to escape execution by signing over his soul to Lucifer, whom Matilda has taught him to summon. Lucifer, after transporting Ambrosio to a remote location, leaves him to die a horrible death. The novel is shocking[7] for many readers even

[7] Rita Felski describes shock as a visceral feeling, "a reaction to what is startling, painful, even horrifying," and in literature, that which is "brusque and brutal." Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 105.

today, as numerous scholars and amateur attest to, and it is the shocking nature of the text that makes it difficult to approach in a scholarly manner—a contention that will be at the heart of my argument.

I arrived at my argument for this chapter through a series of personal experiences with *The Monk* that I later realized illustrate particular scholarly challenges with Lewis's novel and its present reception. When I first read the novel, I carefully annotated the first several pages before finding myself sucked into the plot, staying up late to learn what happens next. (Judging from the nodding heads when I recently admitted this in a roomful of conference attendees, my experience is not uncommon.) Before reading it a second time, I studied several scholarly analyses of the novel, paying special attention to treatments of its emotional features. On my second attempt with *The Monk*, I succeeded in reading slowly and thoughtfully, but I came away with only the material to reiterate the arguments that scholars had already made. I found more analytical traction when approaching the novel through its marketing history, online reviews, and illustrations, which allowed me to return to the text with new possibilities for reading the feelings it portrays and evokes. On revisiting the scholarly criticism, I realized that the normative methods of writing about sensation academically produce readings of *The Monk* that can be profoundly uncomfortable, in which feminist critics claim that no one can sympathize with Lewis's violated female characters or close readers luxuriate in his portrayals of lust and carnage.

Daniel Gross, in his recent book *Uncomfortable Situations*, emphasizes how responsible considerations of mixed feelings necessitate attention to the broader context,

not to individual psychology or a single set of social norms.[8] The mixed feelings to which he refers are the ones within sentimental literature, but his study informs my approach in this chapter. In the case of *The Monk*, the uncomfortable situation includes the way the novel, its publication history, and its critical history encourage conflicting affective responses and the way conventions of critique limit the acceptable practices for writing about this multiplicity of feelings. For example, in a five-star review on Goodreads, one amateur critic writes, "[T]his book turned out to have EVERYTHING that made a novel awesome : romance, poetry, murder, death, kidnapping, evil schemes, satire, social commentary, rape, incest, ghost, demons, poison, secret underground entrances, a devil that throw a guy off a cliff, and FUCKING great PLOT TWISTS!"[9] Amateur critics have the freedom to express appreciation for *The Monk*'s most sensational qualities—like its "awesome" kidnapping and rape—without excusing them. This presents a notable contrast to scholars, who may have no way of writing comfortably about the novel's excess except by claiming that it exists in service of something more literary.

Rita Felski describes the emotionally inflected procedures of scholarship thus: "Academic cultures are governed by distinctive protocols and behaviors, including a stance that we might call professional suspicion. That is to say, a detached, dispassionate, and skeptical demeanor that has become a defining stance in modern purveyors of

[8] Daniel M. Gross, *Uncomfortable Situations: Emotion between Science and the Humanities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[9] Cassandra Lê, review of *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, Goodreads (January 4, 2015), https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1156399263?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1. This reviewer and others praise the book for its prestigious features (like poetry and social commentary) alongside its conventional extremes and surprising plot. Some reviewers also praise the quality of the writing, but not unanimously. One writes, "It can't be accused of being terribly well-written, so you know that old debate between eloquence and plot? If you tip heavily toward eloquence, you might not like this as much." Alex, review of *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, Goodreads (February 4, 2011), https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/145984037?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=2.

knowledge."[10] This prevailing "critical mood" that Felski identifies is an attitude that orients scholars toward texts in certain ways that I will explore later in the chapter in order to demonstrate how both suspicion and absorption can operate uncomfortably on scholars who write about sensation in *The Monk*. In order to explain the particularities of the novel's vexed reception, I will begin by discussing *The Monk*'s production history, emphasizing the ways it encourages two very different kinds of readings and leads to a moment where these two approaches intersect with notable awkwardness. Shifting focus to reception, I will analyze patterns in the affective responses of amateur and professional critics, considering especially how amateurs' candor about the novel's sensationalism contrasts with scholars' uneasiness. After elucidating these responses, I will explore an alternate route to discussing feeling in the novel via a comparison of its illustrations. By this detour, I will finally arrive at the text itself and demonstrate the kind of close reading that had been foreclosed to me when I had tried to read *The Monk* first like a lay reader and then in the dominant scholarly mode. What I hope to offer is one way in which scholars could open up more options for writing about sensational novels and resisting critical trends that no longer fit in this disciplinary moment.

Marketing *The Monk*

Early Marketing: Sentiment and Sensation

The paratexts of the first edition of *The Monk* reveal how it was positioned early on as a respectable and even sentimental novel. Literary theorist Gérard Genette defines the

[10] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 46.

paratext as the accompaniments to a text that make it a book. The paratext includes elements that surround and situate the text, like its title, which he calls the peritext, and elements beyond the text, like advertisements, which he calls the epitext. Together, the paratextual elements work as spaces of entrance into the text where the author or publisher tries to influence a reader's interpretation. These elements carry their own messages and have become objects of study for literary scholars.[11] The first edition of *The Monk*, published by Joseph Bell, includes several signifiers of sophistication, like a "Table of the Poetry" that lists the page numbers of Lewis's interpolated poems. Even before encountering the poems listed inside the book, a potential reader might have seen an advertisement printed in one of London's daily newspapers on the day of the book's publication highlighting its refined qualities over its sensational ones. The names of the included poems take up most of the advertisement and appear in capital letters, whereas its fantastical conventions ("Dreams, Magic Terrors, Spells of Mighty Power. Witches and Ghosts, who rove at midnight hour.") appear in regular title caps near the bottom.[12] Even more tellingly, the advertisement prefaces the list of poems with "THE MONK, a ROMANCE, interspersed with the following Pieces of Poetry." Though the novel's title in the first edition is simply *The Monk: A Romance*, the advertisement elides the title with a description of its contents in a way that establishes a connection between the novel and the work of Ann Radcliffe. Radcliffe's successful 1791 novel was titled *The Romance of the Forest, Interspersed with Some Pieces of Poetry*, and the full title of her most popular novel (published two years before *The Monk*) was *The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Romance; Interspersed with Some Pieces of Poetry*. As I found no earlier novels with similar titles, I

[11] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-11.
[12] Classified Ads, *Star* 2362 (March 12, 1796), *17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers*.

assume that Lewis's publisher Bell used these words in the advertisement to suggest that the novel is Radcliffean, particularly in the sense of being highly literary for a supernatural romance. It is even possible that inattentive readers could have mistaken the work for one of Radcliffe's own, since the first edition includes only Lewis's initials, buried at the end of the preface. The characterization of the novel as one of Radcliffean sophistication may have shaped readers' focus to some extent, as many early critics praise the poetry, and Sir Walter Scott remembers *The Monk*'s most appealing literary innovation as its verse, which "captivated" readers.[13]

Bell's subtle alignment of *The Monk* with Ann Radcliffe's sentimental gothic novels would soon be overpowered by critical outrage when his October 1796 second edition revealed Matthew Lewis as the author and a member of Parliament.[14] Michael Gamer observes that the reviews following the second edition did not liken it to Radcliffe's "respectable" gothics but rather to erotic novels like *Fanny Hill* or German "shudder

[13] Sir Walter Scott, "Essay on Limitations of the Ancient Ballad," *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1841), 563, Google Books. An even more direct paratextual suggestion of the literary worth of *The Monk* is its cost. The advertisement lists the price as ten shillings and sixpence, approximately $63.66 in today's dollars, according to Historical Currency Conversions (https://futureboy.us/fsp/dollar.fsp?), which I use for all monetary conversions in this chapter. This makes *The Monk* nearly as expensive as Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, the production of an established and well-regarded author, and more than twice the amount of Radcliffe's first novel. Rictor Norton, discussing the probable contemporary audience of Radcliffe's novels, writes that at a price of three shillings, her debut novel would have cost almost half a week's salary for domestic and manual workers ($22.74 today), making it prohibitively expensive for many people. Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 5.

[14] It is possible that Bell foresaw this critical outcry and attempted to prevent it by arranging for favorable a review of *The Monk* to appear in the October 1796 issue of the literary periodical the *Monthly Mirror*. The review includes details that excuse the novel (it "was written for the amusement of his leisure during his travels") and its author ("now no more than twenty two years of age") and ones that assert its refinement (an excerpt of a scene with Antonia that features more Radcliffean solemnity than terror and includes the ballad "Alonzo the Brave and the Fair Imogene"). The review features a distinguished portrait of Lewis that I found reused in a later edition of *The Monk*, the Waterford forgery published in 1818 or later, which masquerades as a true first edition. The Waterford edition adds Lewis's name, the portrait, and expensive morocco leather binding with gilt, apparently reasserting the reputable nature of the novel. "M. G. Lewis, Esq. M.P.," the *Monthly Mirror* (October 1796), 322-328, Google Books. The Huntington Library owns a copy of the Waterford forgery with the *Mirror* portrait. For additional information on the Waterford edition and other early editions, see Montague Summers and William B. Todd.

novels," both of which supposedly presented dangers to public morality.[15] Despite or more likely because of reviews like this, *The Monk* went through at least six official editions and many more unauthorized editions and abridged versions between 1796 and 1798 alone.[16] In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were numerous chapbooks, or bluebooks, that excerpted Lewis's novel, usually in thirty-six to seventy-two pages and at affordable prices.[17] One of these bluebooks, from around the time of Lewis's death in 1818, exemplifies how some publishers chose to capitalize on the scandal of *The Monk* and underscore the novel's sensationalism. Priced at sixpence (the 1818 equivalent of about $2.23 today), it includes the most appalling scenes from the novel. The frontispiece shows Ambrosio signing a contract with the devil in lurid colors, depicting the sordid ending of the book on the very first page. This edition's lengthy title (*The Monk, A Romance; in which is depicted the Wonderful Adventures of Ambrosio . . . who was diverted from the track of virtue by the Artifices of a Female Demon . . . seducing him from his VOW OF CELIBACY . . . HE ACCOMPLISHED HIS WICKED MACHINATIONS On the Innocent Virgin . . . he Assigns over his Soul and Body to the Devil . . .*) lists nearly all of the prurient, horrific elements of the main plot of the novel—a striking contrast to the 1796 advertisement's list of poems.[18] This scandalous marketing strategy aligns with the way the Marquis de Sade argues that as "the inevitable

[15] Michael Gamer, "Genres for the Prosecution: Pornography and the Gothic," *PMLA* 144, no. 5 (October 1999): 1047, http://www.jstor.org/stable/463463.
[16] No sales data exists from this time period. André Parreaux, *The Publication of* The Monk: *A Literary Event, 1796-1798* (Paris: Didier, 1960), 13.
[17] See Franz J. Potter, *The History of Gothic Publishing, 1800-1835,* for a nuanced look at the reputation and likely readership of bluebooks.
[18] For an image of the title and frontispiece, see "The Monk by Matthew Lewis," The British Library, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-monk-by-matthew-lewis.

result of the revolutionary shocks which all Europe has suffered," *The Monk* and similar novels provided a necessary jolt of feeling to a desensitized populace.[19]

Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Marketing: Sensation and Abstraction

The paratexts of *The Monk* in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries reveal a fervent contestation of the novel's genre and literary worth that would result in a strained reconciliation similar to the uncomfortable scholarly responses I will examine later. In the twentieth century, after gothic novels had been long out of fashion, scholars began to assert that early gothic fiction deserved be exhumed and studied (whether or not they actually believed that it was good literature).[20] Despite this step toward legitimacy, in the 1960s and '70s American commercial publishers recognized that *The Monk* had the potential to appeal to the masses, and they printed editions with covers that brand the book anachronistically as different kinds of sordid genre fiction that were popular in the mid-twentieth century. The book jackets of these popular editions are worth studying, as scholar Nicole Matthews writes that in addition to signaling literary value, book covers "help readers make sense of the kind of book they are about to read, giving an impression of its genre, its tone and the kind of audience it seeks."[21] The collaboration of many people results in a book jacket that in itself has a great deal of power over the reading experience, and the ones that follow play up the novel's licentiousness and menace, using generic

[19] Marquis de Sade, "Reflections on the Novel," in *The 120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, trans. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (London: Arrow Books, 1991), 108-109.
[20] Building on this early-twentieth-century recovery work, publishers began to print editions of *The Monk* that seem intended to assert its importance as fine literature. In France, Surrealist Antonin Artaud wrote a loose translation of *The Monk*, published in 1931, which introduced the novel to fans of high-concept art. In 1952 in the United States, Grove Press reprinted Lewis's novel, edited by Lewis's future biographer Louis Peck, with an introduction by poet and scholar John Berryman.
[21] Nicole Matthews, Introduction, *Judging a Book by Its Cover: Fans, Publishers, Designers, and the Marketing of Fiction*, ed. Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), xi.

tropes to convey what we could interpret as more nuanced suggestions. Like some of the online reviews of the novel that I will discuss in the next section, they incorporate feeling and textual analysis in a way that seems harmonious.

The three covers below assert the importance of sensation in *The Monk*, while also portraying the novel's characters and situations with insight. Because they present the novel as a conventional thriller of the type associated with less-discerning readers, we might assume that the pictures on the cover would be stock images chosen with only genre in mind. However, each of these covers attends to the text more than the highbrow covers I will turn to shortly, suggesting themes and illustrating the ambiguities of the novel's relationships.

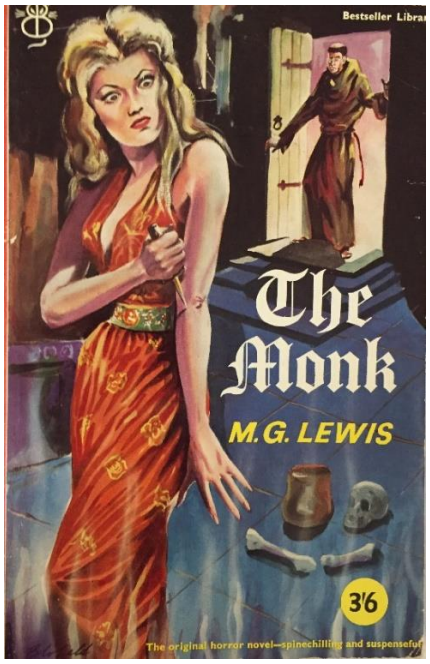


Figure 1: Cover of the Bestseller Library edition of *The Monk* (London: Paul Elek Limited, 1960).

The cover above is that of the Paul Elek Bestseller Library edition from 1960. At first glance the image would appear to fit any pulp mystery, with bright colors, a prominent attractive woman, and a suggestion of danger. The woman grips a dagger with a look of rage or

disgust, while a shadowy monk enters through the doorway behind her. Though distorted, this image recalls the scene in the novel where Matilda threatens to kill herself while Ambrosio looks on. The cover enhances the suspense of this moment by styling the woman as a femme fatale and making it unclear whether the monk is surprising her in the act of cutting herself, approaching her without realizing she intends to stab him, or sneaking up on her to attack before she can. In this way it takes an important thematic element of the novel—a shifting balance of sexual power and threat—and packages it as a racy thriller.

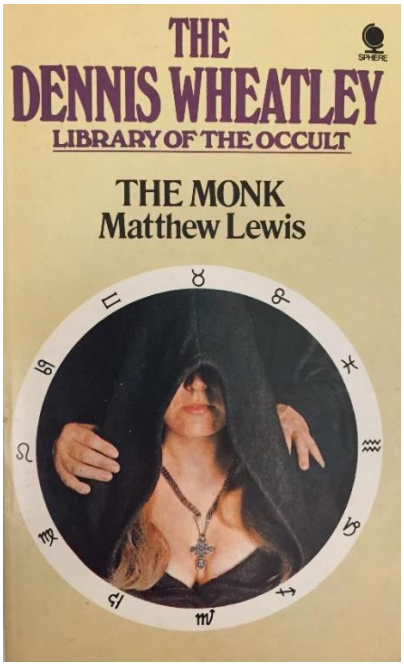


Figure 2: Cover of the Dennis Wheatley Library of the Occult edition of *The Monk*, Sphere Books Limited, 1974.

This cover incorporates some of *The Monk*'s infamous blasphemy in a way appropriate to a mid-twentieth-century genre novel. The Sphere Books edition (1974) is from the Dennis Wheatley Library of the Occult, a series named after a best-selling midcentury author of thrillers and occult novels. The cover features Wheatley's name more prominently than Lewis's to label this as the kind of novel a Wheatley fan would enjoy.

Though the woman's black hood and crucifix identify her as Matilda, who poses as a monk, the zodiac symbols of the series ring the image, and these along with the black hood suggest a secret society more than a monastery. This mystical imagery not only appeals to the intended audience of the series but also reflects the manner in which the novel mixes Catholicism and devil worship. The long blond hair, cleavage, and caressing hands promise the sensual intrigue that the novel does indeed deliver, though the hands could also be poised to pull off the cowl and unmask the woman, or even to strangle her. In addition to selling the novel as an erotic thriller, this uncertainty accurately characterizes Ambrosio's conflicting impulses of desire, righteousness, and violence, as well as evoking the issues of concealment and authenticity that recur in scholarship on the novel.

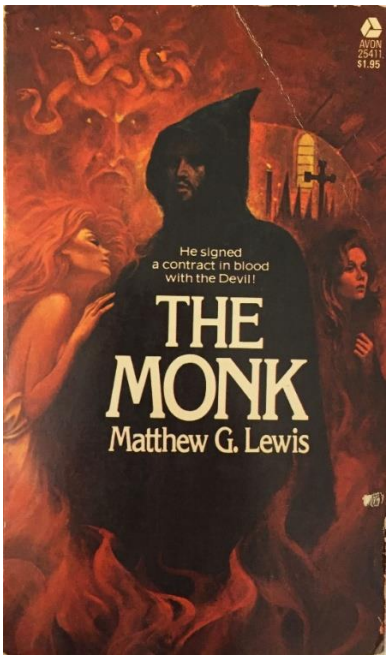


Figure 3: Cover of the Avon edition of *The Monk*, Avon Books, 1975.

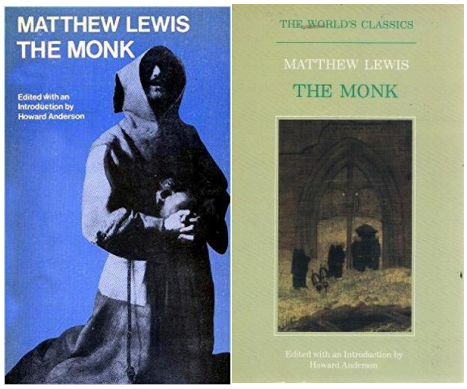
This final genre paperback cover, of an Avon edition from 1975, depicts the behavior and narrative importance of several of the novel's characters, though in the manner of a more modern sensational novel. Ambrosio, Matilda, Antonia, and the devil all

appear, as a mysterious monk, a scorching temptress, a forlorn beauty, and a serpent-haired demon. Above the title appear the words "He signed a contract in blood with the devil!" using the horrid ending, like the 1818 edition did, to lure readers in.[22] The back cover titillates with "Two beautiful women! An unholy lust!" In this image, the monk appears in the center, taking up more space than the other characters, recalling how Lewis makes Ambrosio's thoughts, feelings, and actions central to the novel. His face is in shadow, but his sensual lips are apparent, just as Lewis portrays Ambrosio as being secretly lustful. The woman on the left encircles the monk, her dress and hair merging with flames and the devil looming above her, similar to how Matilda can be read as an extension of Lucifer who seduces Ambrosio into sex and hellfire. The woman on the right faces away from the monk, clutching herself protectively, her dark hair and clothing making her barely distinguishable from the monk's robe and the tomb behind her in a manner akin to the way Lewis deemphasizes her subjectivity. The black robe of the monk contrasts with the red-tinted characters surrounding him, suggesting that Lewis depicts the other characters as background objects that bring Ambrosio's identity into focus through temptation and conflict.

As trade publishers like the ones above worked to convince fans of midcentury genre fiction that *The Monk* would be a sexy, thrilling page-turner, critical efforts to legitimize early gothic novels intensified, allowing scholarly publishers to present Lewis's novel to readers as a canonical work that could be abstracted from its sensational appeal.[23]

[22] In addition to using the plot as a selling point, the Avon edition lists the price on the cover. At $1.95, it would convert to about $9 today, and it looks like the equivalent of today's $7.99 mass market paperbacks.
[23] Around this time, several major scholarly works focused on or featured *The Monk*, including Parreaux's *The Publication of The Monk* (1960), Louis F. Peck's *A Life of Matthew G. Lewis* (1961), Robert D. Hume's "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic novel" (1969), and Robert Kiely's *The Romantic Novel in England* (1972).

Trevor Ross has described the English canon-making project as one that attempted to distance literature from worldly concerns and uses and redefine it as an object of personal appreciation and edifying moral feelings.[24] Oxford University Press in particular has published several editions of *The Monk* over the years that construct the novel as an object of refined appreciation through their covers and their choice of writers to introduce the novel. In 1973, OUP released a hardcover edition with an introduction by Howard Anderson, a scholar of the eighteenth century. This first OUP edition has a plain brown cover, and it was listed for sale in England at four pounds, approximately $51 today, which suggests OUP intended it for serious scholars only. The covers of the paperback OUP editions that followed, which would have been more affordable for the average reader, still bear little resemblance to the sensational paperback covers of Avon et. al.



Figures 4 and 5: Covers of the Oxford University Press editions of *The Monk*, 1977 and 1985. Courtesy of Oxford University Press.

On both of the above covers, from 1977 and 1985, the words "Edited with an Introduction by Howard Anderson" signal subtly to readers that the novel has been meticulously attended to by someone with scholarly training. Both establish a spooky atmosphere, but

[24] Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998).

they are much more subdued in color and content than the other paperback covers. Because they both depict Catholicism, they offer a potential reader more clues about the story than the plain brown hardcover, but the images don't reveal specific aspects of the plot. In these paperback versions, it seems as if Oxford was trying to position *The Monk* as an approachable but literary novel, and the vagueness of the cover art could be a way of rising above the erotic, gruesome, blasphemous specificity that tarred the novel's reputation in the eighteenth century, instead attempting to lift it into the more abstract realm of the classics. They present the novel from a critical distance that allows it to blend in with the canon of important novels that enable a rarefied appreciation of literature.

Neither the commercial covers nor university press covers entirely misrepresent the book, but they prepare readers for drastically different kinds of experiences that will become particularly relevant when we look at the generic categorization and critical moods of the novel's twentieth- and twenty-first-century reception. The commercial covers promise the sensations that *The Monk* does indeed offer: the pull of mystery, shiver of terror, shock of horror, and tingle of eroticism. They introduce important characters, settings, relationships, and situations. The depictions of the characters even imply some of the interpretations that scholars have explicated: that sex and violence, sex and religion, or religion and violence are sometimes indistinguishable from each other; that Ambrosio, despite his darkness, is the most accessible character; that Ambrosio, despite his centrality, has no free will. Yet despite the complexities these commercial covers reveal to an attentive viewer, they also imbue expectations that would likely create friction for many readers. Their repackaging of the novel with the visual tropes of popular mid-twentieth-century genres could leave readers unprepared for the way Lewis treats his subject matter,

particularly the feelings of disgust they might experience at his brutal, graphic descriptions of rape, murder, and decay; for the intellectual pleasures of the philosophical and literary aspects of the novel; or for the linguistic and stylistic frustrations presented by a text originally published in 1796. By depicting situations from the text in ways typical of pulp novels of the mid-twentieth century, they distort the particularities of *The Monk*'s plot to conform better to midcentury genre formulas and prime readers for conventions they won't actually encounter. Meanwhile, the Oxford paperback editions distort *The Monk*'s particularities by erasing them (as in the cover where a nearly faceless monk prays against a flat blue background) or by blurring them (like the cover in which figures appear as dark blobs in an abbey). The university press covers offer an abstraction of a classic novel, one that has something to do with religion but is most compelling for its membership in an exclusive club gatekept by a reputable publisher and scholar. Readers of those editions who had no prior knowledge of Lewis and who skipped the introduction would be unprepared for the manner in which *The Monk* actually *is* a genre novel—its compelling plot, gothic tropes, stock characters, and evocation of base feelings. Readers expecting sensational fiction could still find what they sought in *The Monk*, but those expecting a lofty classic might have a more difficult time adjusting.

More recently, Oxford University Press attempted to accommodate readers of genre fiction, publishing a sensationalized edition that may surprise anyone familiar with their approachably scholarly branding. For example, the 2008 and 2016 Oxford World's Classics editions are introduced by Emma McEvoy and Nick Groom, professors who study gothic and romantic literature and culture. Both of those covers feature images of monks without context, with Oxford's traditional white bar near the bottom with the author, title, and

series in small print. The 2002 pocket-sized hardcover edition, in contrast, includes an introduction by horror novelist Stephen King and features a jacket design that looks more like a mass-market horror cover than an Oxford World's Classics one.[25] King has a BA in English and has taught high school, but his scholarly credentials are not on par with the academics who write the other introductions. This shows in the citations for his introduction, which consist, in their entirety, of *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural*, McEvoy's introduction to another Oxford edition of the novel, and the novel itself.[26] And in a gaffe that would embarrass a scholar, he refers to Matilda as "Martha."[27] These details cast doubt on whether King performed much research or even read the novel very carefully before composing his introduction, but his authority, unlike a scholar's, is not much damaged by doubts like these. His credibility stems instead from his decades of experience writing successful horror novels and even essays on the horror genre.[28] He is an expert on sensationalism.

The Oxford King cover does not advance a visual claim to literary respectability for King or Lewis but instead mimics mass-market horror covers by best-selling authors like Dean Koontz and King himself, pandering to fans of these books. It doesn't follow all the

[25] The Oxford King edition appears unusual even among OUP's other hardcovers categorized as "general interest" in literature. Of the four currently in print, all have introductions by scholars, and though their cover designs are more similar to those of trade publishers than the to those of Oxford World's Classics paperbacks, they look like trade covers of fine literature.

[26] For comparison, the Penguin Classics introduction by Christopher MacLachlan cites Louis Peck's biography of Matthew Lewis, a bibliographical essay, a theoretical work, and several major studies on gothic novels.

[27] Stephen King, introduction to *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), xiii.

[28] Though he produces fiction that many critics see as comparable to junk food, King also earns frequent comparisons to Shakespeare, Dickens, and Poe for his simultaneous popular appeal and stylistically and thematically formidable work. Greg Smith, in an article published the same year King's Oxford edition was printed, examines some of the causes of King's bad reputation, such as the poorly made films based on his work, his high productivity, and his association with the perennially maligned gothic horror genre. Smith argues for the literary and emotional value of King's work. Greg Smith, "The Literary Equivalent of a Big Mac and Fries?: Academics, Moralists, and the Stephen King Phenomenon," *The Midwest Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2002): 329-345, ProQuest.

visual conventions of that genre of covers, like making the author's name larger than the title, but if it were a paperback it would not look out of place at a supermarket or airport.

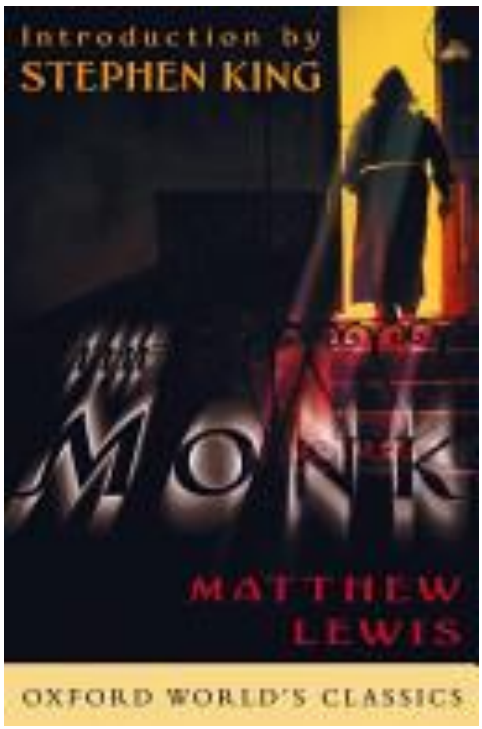


Figure 6: Cover of the Oxford University Press edition of *The Monk*, 2002. Courtesy of Oxford University Press and Andrea Pistolesi.

The Oxford King cover courts fans of modern horror by visually suggesting that Lewis's eighteenth-century novel is like King's twentieth- and twenty-first-century ones. King's name appears prominently, set above Lewis's and in a slightly larger font despite its modestly tighter kerning. The font of King's name resembles the ones on the covers of his own novels. Even more obviously, the image and design of the Oxford edition recall several editions of King's books. Comparing the cover of the Oxford King *Monk* with editions of King's popular novels, I noticed similar color schemes and recurring images of silhouettes or otherwise indistinct figures and open doorways, glowing lights, and long shadows. The

jacket designer Oxford recruited for the King edition, David Stevenson, works at Del Rey, an imprint of Penguin Random House that publishes fantasy and science fiction books. He has designed covers for massively successful Anne McCaffrey and Terry Brooks novels, making him an expert at packaging genre fiction of the sort that seems incompatible with Oxford's brand. Oxford put a great deal of effort into visually replicating a mass-market horror novel, even making this hardcover almost exactly the size of a typical $7.99 paperback. Yet the hardcover format and Oxford World's Classic label show that Oxford insisted upon clinging to a modicum of prestige that, in this context, seems embarrassingly awkward. I will discuss a similar kind of awkwardness in the next section, on critical responses.

Genre and Feeling in Reception

Distinction and Absorption

For some scholars, the fact that Oxford University Press likened Matthew Lewis to Stephen King would probably be disturbing in its blurring of distinctions, given the pains they've taken to argue for the correct way to categorize *The Monk*, often as against its more vulgar counterparts. For instance, Coral Ann Howells, in her study from 1978, writes that Lewis "plays with certain predictable responses in his readers, sometimes exploiting Gothic convention when he wants sensationalism and horrific effects and sometimes drawing attention to their artificiality through comic burlesque," constructing the author as a clever manipulator of unsophisticated conventions of feeling.[29] Quoting the full title of the sensational, plot-spoiling bluebook from 1818 that I mentioned above, she admits that its "skeletal account captures the emphasis on sex and violence that we find in the original,"

[29] Coral Ann Howells, *Love, Mystery and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), 63-64.

but she objects that "by its sheer crudity of language it transforms *The Monk* into a piece of lurid Gothic pornography, totally neglecting the narrative artifice of the novel together with its wit and range of tone."[30] It is difficult to see what it is about the *language* of the title that Howell finds crude—the summary even euphemistically calls Ambrosio's vicious rape of Antonia "his wicked machinations." The title's alleged lack of refinement, then, is perhaps only evident in the fact that it alludes to the scandalous aspects of Lewis's plot without suggesting that the real draw is the literary craft. Howells argues that the erotic passages deserve attention for their "variations on the theme of sexual disaster," and she implies that any reader who fails to be excited by Lewis's literary skill above all is missing the point of the novel.[31] Twenty years later, James Watt argues that *The Monk*'s early critics mistook it for the kind of "mass-produced uniformity that Lewis so clearly defined his work against" (i.e., Minerva romances) and that rather than being an exemplar of gothic fiction, it is an anti-gothic work.[32] Instead of allowing that *The Monk* can be pleasure reading, some scholars dispute its kinship with titillating, plot-driven, conventional gothic fiction, even if that means redefining those terms and invalidating the responses of other readers.

Whether amateur critics are aware that *The Monk*'s status has been contested or not, they value its stimulation over its distinction. Perhaps because they judge the novel to be a classic, several online reviewers consider it in terms of high school assigned reading and sound relieved that it is not the abstracted canonical work that many of its editions present it as. One Goodreads reviewer writes, "It was written in the era of the great classics, but this one is never going to be taught in schools," and another laments, "Seriously high

[30] Howells, *Love, Mystery and Misery*, 65.
[31] Howells, *Love, Mystery and Misery*, 65.
[32] James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 94, 100.

school kids would have loved the hell out of this and seek to read more classics were they not confined to snoring tomes like . . . idk, A scarlet letter?"[33] When amateur critics show awareness of scornful attitudes toward *The Monk*, they tend to counter them with their own scorn for academic snobbery. One describes scholars who write disdainful introductions to gothic fiction as "act[ing] as if they've been forced to become circus geeks, biting the heads off chickens for booze."[34] Another writes that the scholar who introduces her edition "totally missed the point," arguing that the novel is not "an Exploration of the Fall of a Virtuous Man, and all that kind of crap" but rather a "rousing good read" that was "written to entertain - and titillate."[35] They write as if they believe they understand *The Monk* better than academic readers, which is reasonable considering that much of the novel's scholarly marketing and reception has obscured or minimized the sensational qualities that are readily apparent in the text.

In general, amateur reviewers seem to enjoy *The Monk* more than other gothic novels of its era, perhaps because Oxford's modern-horror marketing, though awkward, makes an argument for the similarity of the works of Stephen King and Matthew Lewis that actually has substance. It is impossible to tell how many amateur reviewers came to *The Monk* through the Oxford King edition, or through the Valancourt Books edition that

[33] Petra X, review of *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, Goodreads (October 26, 2012), https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/442161964?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1; Cassandra Lê, review.

[34] Nina Shishkoff, review of *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, Amazon (April 26, 2006), https://www.amazon.com/gp/customer-reviews/RJGOE7RJR9KL7/ref=cm_cr_getr_d_rvw_ttl?ie=UTF8&ASIN=0198704453. Shishkoff uses examples from the introduction to what may be *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* and what is definitely the introduction to the Dover edition of *The Monk*, which consists of a scathing assessment of the novel by E. A. Baker that was originally published in a 1907 Routledge edition.

[35] Althea Ann, review of *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, Goodreads (June 9, 2010), https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/106337000?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=2. This reviewer "will not dignify the author of said intro by even mentioning his name," but it may have been Howard Anderson.

republished King's introduction after the Oxford version went out of print, or through Goodreads lists of books recommended for fans of Stephen King's work. That said, many online reviewers of *The Monk* seem unprepared for an eighteenth-century novel but nevertheless receptive, in ways that we could expect of King enthusiasts. Several reviewers complain about *The Monk*'s old-fashioned capitalization and phrasing but still find it engrossing, and a handful mention their appreciation of King in their praise of Lewis's novel. One Goodreads reviewer who notes King's admiration for the novel gives it five stars, writing, "With the 18th century dialect and coinage it was slow reading at first, but it didn't take long for me to soon be absorbed in the plot, anxious and worried for the victims while shocked by the behavior of the villains. This book will have readers glued to the pages and losing track of time."[36] This sympathetic engagement is typical of many of the reviews I read, as are less fine feelings: one amateur critic writes that on first reading the novel, "my hair rose perpendicularly from my scalp and tingles spread across my nether regions."[37]

Scholars who worked to distinguish *The Monk* from less sophisticated gothic fiction would probably be dismayed to learn that readers who pick it up today often compare it not only to Stephen King novels but also to even less prestigious works. The same Goodreads reviewer who recalls *The Monk*'s effect on his nether regions also advertises the novel as "the Texas Chainsaw Massacre of Gothic novels which will unjade the most jaded," and a reviewer on LibraryThing observes, "This book is 18th century smut. It's the Janet

[36] Suzanne Moore, review of *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, Goodreads (May 28, 2009), https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/57702280?book_show_action=false&from_review_page=2.
[37] Paul Bryant, review of *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, Goodreads (September 25, 2007), https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/6759421?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1.

Evanovich of their time."[38] These amateur critics both gave the novel four stars out of five, and though they seem aware that comparing it to a slasher film or the bestsellers of a romance writer will be perceived as an insult to its quality, they also use these comparisons as recommendations, showing receptivity to the kind of thrills these low-status works offer.

Perhaps because of the "professional suspicion" Rita Felski describes as the dominant critical mood of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, scholars phrase their responses to *The Monk* much more carefully than these amateur critics do, even (or especially) when they champion pleasure reading. Devendra Varma, one of the early scholarly advocates for gothic fiction, performs a typical balancing act of criticism and commendation when appraising Lewis's work: "His inflamed imagination and violent exaggeration of emotion suggest adolescence, yet he thrills his readers and makes their flesh creep. This author of remarkable talent makes horrors come crowding thick upon us, and often crudely resorts to the physically horrible . . . Yet, so great is the interest of his unadorned narrative, with its quick succession of events, that such bold exaggeration seems only fitting."[39] In this assessment, Varma rapidly alternates between acknowledging perceived defects and meting out praise while using terms that distance him from his opinions and responses ("suggest," "thrills his readers," "the interest of his . . . narrative," "seems"). But like amateur critics, he finds value in Lewis's sensational, gripping writing, and he includes himself in the feelings he describes with "we." Though there have been vast changes in scholarly attitudes toward popular fiction since 1957, most scholars still tread

[38] Bryant, review; HopingforChange, review of *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, LibraryThing (January 21, 2013), http://www.librarything.com/work/20380/reviews/93374795.
[39] Varma, *Gothic Flame*, 139-140.

carefully on this topic. As recently as 2012, Victoria Nelson recalls her first encounter with *The Monk* in a first-person narrative without modulating her younger self's pleasure, but she includes details that protect her status as a serious academic. She writes that as a Berkeley undergraduate, instead of researching Chaucer for her senior honors thesis, she spent a day sitting on the floor in one of the school libraries "enthralled by this salacious tale of lustful monks, evil abbesses, complaisant nuns, and a baby's corpse decaying in an underground crypt. I gulped down its 400-odd pages in one go, staggering out of the stacks a few head-spinning hours later stiff and disoriented but eager for more."[40] Nelson describes her enjoyment of this plot-driven, dramatic work without shame, and yet she distances herself from that enjoyment by recounting this scene from her youth, and she precludes any doubts about her sophistication by mentioning her prestigious university, her impressive academic standing, and her knowledge of medieval literature. Even the university library setting and her account of reading four hundred pages in only a few hours attest to her scholarly credibility. Scholars of popular literature today can admit to enjoying absorbing plots and sensations without implicating themselves as long as they qualify their enjoyment with critical distance, but as I will show in the following section, this negotiation between sensational absorption and critical distance can sometimes result in uncomfortable contortions—contortions that I will offer an alternative to in the final sections of this chapter.

[40] Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka: Vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), x.

Brutal Enthusiasm

The uncomfortable situation of being a scholar who writes about a novel like *The Monk* is not easily resolved. The hypercritical mode of many recent scholars that Felski identifies may limit the range of feelings we can express about texts, but it also often emerges from a desire to attend to the ways our engagement with texts can have negative social implications. Amateur critics have no professional mandate to censure socially objectionable portrayals in fiction, and the freedom with which some of them praise the shocking aspects of *The Monk* can itself seem shocking. For example, in a Goodreads review, after citing Coleridge and considering how the novel portrays the complexity of evil, an amateur critic blithely declares, "Antonia is so gullible you feel she deserves all she gets and more 😂."[41] Good background information, thoughtful meditations on themes, and approvals of the depiction of the rape and murder of a pious young woman are not incompatible in amateur reviews.[42] Statements like this one are also not limited to amateur critics, as King expresses similar sentiments in his introduction to the Oxford edition of *The Monk*. King endorses Lewis's sympathetic attitude toward his rapist character as that of "a young man with a healthy sex drive" and his comic depiction of a governess's kidnapping as "exactly what we want" in its "black humor."[43] Because their reputation is not at stake in the same way it is for scholars, King and amateur reviewers can sometimes appear to be

[41] Stela, review of *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis, Goodreads (November 28, 2012), https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/465736396?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1.
[42] Certainly not all thoughtful reviews of *The Monk* commend its treatment of female characters. A handful of amateur critics that I read grapple with the issue of misogyny while assessing the book.
[43] King, introduction, xiii, xi. These opinions are in line with King's essay on the cathartic qualities of horror movies.

remarkably comfortable with expressing enjoyment of *The Monk*'s least respectable qualities.

These overt statements of support for Lewis's misogynistic motif may appear starkly different from scholarly assessments, but I will argue that a similar acceptance of the novel's attitude toward women emerges in scholarly treatments of *The Monk* if we look closely enough. For instance, in some of the pioneering gothic studies, though scholars do not express approval of the way the novel's female characters are brutalized, they evoke a similarly brutal attitude toward femininity when they write about the novel's genre. Even today, scholars traditionally discuss Lewis and Ann Radcliffe together because of the common narrative that *The Monk* responded to *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* responded to *The Monk*, and revisiting some of the earliest instances of this comparison reveals that implicit in it can be a misogynistic attitude. The gendered genre binaries that scholars utilize when contrasting Radcliffe and Lewis (female and male gothic, terror and horror, moderate and transgressive) sometimes cast the two authors (or their novels, the writers they influenced, or their readers) as a sheltered, timid woman and a wild, bold man. For instance, in 1978 Howells writes that "Lewis is shocking and subversive in a way that Mrs Radcliffe never was in his exploration of the dark irrational hinterland of the human mind," as if he is an intrepid explorer.[44] More troublingly, some early scholars create scenarios in which the Lewisian man menaces the Radcliffean woman. Montague Summers writes that "Mrs. Radcliffe shrank from the dark diablerie of Lewis," and Michael Sadleir narrates, "Into the firelit refuge of the Radcliffian novelist the follower of Lewis would fain intrude, haggard and with water streaming from his lank hair, shrieking . . . then, when he

[44] Howells, *Love, Mystery and Misery*, 79.

had struck the company with silent fear, he would wish to vanish once again into the howling darkness."[45] The seemingly inoffensive idea that Lewis's novel unsettled the status quo looks not quite so inoffensive when coupled with imagery that recalls the way his male characters violate his female ones.

Feminist Voyeurism

Even scholars who object to the novel's treatment of female characters can end up aligning themselves with the perspective they censure through their own interpretive methods. Feminist critic Judith Fetterley, writing in 1978 about the masculine tradition of American authorship, argues that "a female reader is co-opted into participation from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself."[46] Building on this description of coercive reading, she writes, "Powerlessness is the subject and powerlessness the experience," as female readers are forcibly alienated from the classic literary plots of men dominating women.[47] Using a similar framework to Fetterley's, feminist critics have repeatedly called attention to the novel's tendency to objectify and show contempt for women,[48] but some suggest that readers have no choice but to inhabit a masculinized,

[45] Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1964), 233; Sadleir, "'All Horrid?'" 185.
[46] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), xii. Fetterley's study is one of many that drew inspiration from Laura Mulvey's 1975 "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which coined the term "the male gaze" and offered feminist scholars new ways of conceptualizing their relationship to texts.
[47] Fetterley, *Resisting Reader*, xiii.
[48] Some scholars have attempted to complicate this assessment, from Daniel Watkins's argument that Matilda repurposes masculine power to queer readings by George Haggerty and Max Fincher to interpretations of Matilda as transgender, most recently by Nowell Marshall. Daniel P. Watkins, "Social Hierarchy in Matthew Lewis's "The Monk," *Studies in the Novel* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 120, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29532407; George E. Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 11; Max Fincher, *Queering Gothic in the*

heterosexual, lascivious, dehumanizing point of view while reading, as if the novel forces readers to take a position they find abhorrent. Under the control of Lewis's narrative, they imply that there is no possibility of reading his abused female characters sympathetically. In describing the rape scene, Howells observes that it reads like pornography, and though she clarifies that its carnal account is not sexually exciting, she maintains that "there is for us the voyeuristic fascination of watching how far conventional limits can be transgressed," as if the depiction of a taboo compels all readers to become mesmerized spectators and leaves no option of withdrawing in disgust.[49] Elizabeth Napier concurs, arguing that Lewis's writing inspires "a kind of prurient curiosity that depends upon withdrawal and distance."[50] Though the novel appears to advocate for compassion, she claims, the way it aestheticizes sex and violence makes pity impossible for readers. She writes that Lewis "puts the reader in the novel's most crucial moments in the position of a voyeur" and makes his victimized characters "undergo punishments so extreme as to excite horror rather than pity," and she hints that Antonia desires the man who rapes and kills her and thus prevents readers from having "[a] correct response to this purest of characters."[51] Napier disallows the possibility of readers having a simultaneously aesthetic and emotional response, or being capable of feeling both revolted at the violence and sympathetic for the victim, or reading Antonia's warmth toward Ambrosio as that of a sibling, or being capable of a "correct" response to a victim even if that victim is not irreproachable, or even reading against Lewis's authorial prompts in order to feel into fictional suffering. These scholars'

Romantic Age: The Penetrating Eye (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 94; Nowell Marshall, "Beyond Queer Gothic: Charting the Gothic History of the Trans Subject in Beckford, Lewis, Byron," in *TransGothic in Literature and Culture*, ed. Jolene Zigarovich (New York: Routledge, 2018), 25-52.

[49] Howells, *Love, Mystery and Misery*, 75.

[50] Elizabeth R. Napier, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 115.

[51] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 117, 119, 120.

insistence that Lewis's distancing techniques allow for no emotional connection with his female characters ends up sounding like an acceptance of the novel's voyeurism and misogyny rather than the objection that they likely intend.

Too-Close-for-Comfort Reading

Close reading, which could provide an antidote to the distance and disconnection that many feminist critics identify, can end up performing an uncomfortable sympathy with the text as well. Fredric Bogel recently championed close reading as a practice of what he calls "true infatuation"—intense attention to the text that is comparable to erotic obsession.[52] This erotic textual obsession, when applied to *The Monk*, can become unseemly. When scholars take time to analyze the passages in which they find Lewis's writing most effective, their careful literary analysis begins to sound like they are reveling in the sensational violence and sex. Robert Kiely observes Lewis's tendency toward abstract, indirect writing and descriptions of Ambrosio's sensible bewilderment, in contrast to which "the encounters with female corpses are, in addition to their intrinsic unpleasantness, stylistically striking."[53] Kiely meditates on the power of Lewis's specificity and simplicity of style in these scenes where women are dead or dying, writing that passages like the one where Ambrosio chokes and suffocates Elvira or the one where a mob tramples the prioress interrupt the conventional and "possess an energy and realism for which the reader is not fully prepared."[54] Though Kiely means to make the point that the directness of Lewis's violent writing makes the violence more awful and the victims more

[52] Fredric V. Bogel, *New Formalist Criticism: Theory and Practice* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[53] Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 112-113.
[54] Kiely, *Romantic Novel in England*, 113-114.

human, his appreciation of forceful style sounds like an appreciation of violent action in this context. George Haggerty similarly venerates Lewis's skill with violent scenes, analyzing how his combination of abstractions and vivid carnage in his description of the prioress's mutilation makes the scene conceptually and viscerally effective. He goes so far as to claim that this philosophical brutality is the only effective technique Lewis could have used to make readers feel this scene without having another character's reactions to prompt them: "Without the filter of a responding consciousness, there is no other way to assure affective success. If we are disgusted, Lewis has succeeded."[55] The tendency of literary scholars to write as if their own response is the only possible one can be jarring when they linger appreciatively over scenes of violence or sex that obviously provoke very different responses in other readers.

Writing in this mode, Ahmet Süner delves into the sexuality of a moment that I will revisit shortly, in which Matilda bares her breast, contending that Lewis's language enhances the erotic effect of the scene even as it appears to be modestly euphemistic. He writes, "The sensation . . . overtakes the metaphor, taking over the object; consequently, the object is surrendered to the bare mechanics and bare metaphoricity of sensation . . . all these clichéd metaphors are already chewed and devoured so that they may unobtrusively give way to the free flow of desire."[56] His own language as he analyzes Lewis's sounds like a sexual encounter, or a sexual assault: "overtakes," "taking over," "surrendered," "bare," "devoured," "free flow of desire." Süner likely intended this sexualized analytical language to reinforce his point about the passage's prurience, but it ends up seeming as if Süner has

[55] Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1989), 25.
[56] Ahmet Süner, "The Unveiling Gaze and the Superstition of Sexuality in *The Monk*," *Journal of Yaşar University* 8 (2013): 75, Academic Search Complete.

been absorbed into the voyeurism and sensual ecstasy he was trying to parse. When scholars analyze Lewis's sensational writing, whether they chafe at it or embrace it, they often implicate themselves.

Because of the ways that normative scholarly methodologies shape discussions of sensation, critiques or close readings of *The Monk*'s depictions of violent rage and transgressive desire can implicate scholars, but they are also limited in the ways they can address Lewis's portrayals of other feelings. The suspicious critical mood informs the way scholars approach Lewis's less embodied descriptions of emotion, which they tend to find false. For instance, scholars have written that the hero Raymond's horror upon encountering a ghost has "the behaviouristic detail of a theatrical performance," that Ambrosio's frequent confusion of mixed emotions makes him "flutter and reel" like a sensible heroine, that Agnes's grief over her dead child is part of an "over-the-top tableau" typical of Lewis's "theatrical excess," and that the sadness of Antonia's reunion with her beloved and her mother's ghost as she dies "is undercut by Lewis's parodic manipulation of Sentimental conventions."[57] Whether these scholars assume that Lewis is forced to write in the style of drama or sentimental novels because of a lack of available fictional options or that he is performing a critique of these modes, they generally do not find these emotional moments worthy of sustained critical attention.[58] What options exist for scholars who want to write about the novel's emotions but don't have an acceptable scholarly method for doing so without either dismissing its portrayals of fear, confusion, and sadness as

[57] Howells, *Love, Mystery and Misery*, 71; Kiely, *Romantic Novel in England*, 113; Robert Miles, "Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis," in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 105; Jacqueline Howard, *Reading Gothic Fiction: A Bakhtinian Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 194.
[58] A notable exception to this would be Stephen Ahern's reading of Lewis's sentimental rhetoric in *Affected Sensibilities*, which dwells for several pages on what this rhetoric does rather than why it is ineffective.

ineffective or analyzing its portrayals of lust and rage in ways that become disturbingly aligned with those feelings? This is the bind I found myself in after rereading *The Monk* with the voices of these scholars in my head. A lay critic's comparatively broad range of affective choices do not fit comfortably within a scholarly role. What ended up working for me was to approach emotional scenes not through feeling but through seeing, by first considering how artists have illustrated them. My next section will show how this kind of consideration can reveal a variety of affective and interpretive possibilities in a single textual moment, and my final section will explore what these possibilities can open up in the text itself.

Illustrating Emotion

In this section, I will return to visual analysis, focusing on illustrations rather than book covers. Rachel Schmidt writes that illustrations of narratives require that the artist engage in a process of interpretation (possibly in collaboration with the author or publisher) that will enhance certain effects of the text for readers.[59] In the case of *Don Quixote*, Schmidt argues that early illustrations were involved in shaping the novel's critical reception. Many of the illustrated editions of *The Monk* that I could find actually appear to have little in common with the novel's critical reception, unlike its twentieth- and twenty-first-century book covers. Whereas the book covers represent extremes of sensationalism or abstraction and thus illuminate the mixture of extremes that I have argued are operating uncomfortably in certain scholarly treatments of the novel, the illustrations present a

[59] Rachel Schmidt, *Critical Images: The Canonization of* Don Quixote *through Illustrated Editions of the Eighteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 8.

wider range of feelings, and many are indeterminate in their affect. In contrast to book covers, which govern readers' impressions of the book as a whole early in the reading experience, illustrations represent carefully chosen moments and provide visual cues for understanding them. The moments that are chosen for illustrations and the ways particular artists interpret them provide multiple possibilities for contextualizing an emotional situation at a particular point in the text.

After viewing every illustration I could locate, from soon after the novel's publication to the 1980s, I discovered that the moment in which Matilda exposes her breast and threatens to end her life is by far the most common visual representation from the main plot of the novel.[60] This is perhaps in part because it allows artists to titillate with nudity, though what is arguably the most sensual scene, when Ambrosio spies on Antonia bathing, was illustrated in only one of the editions I found. The moment of threatened suicide, occurring in the scene where Rosario reveals herself to be Matilda, is also likely a subject of fascination because the scene is when the stable ground of gender identity gives way in the novel, which some artists emphasize by portraying both figures in their entirety, so viewers can see that they are dressed identically in monks' robes. Interdependent with Lewis's portrayal of sexuality and gender in the scene, though, is his portrayal of power. As I will examine in my close readings of the next section, the drawn-out scene in the novel features complex, shifting power dynamics (which become even more complex once the reader knows that Matilda is actually a demon manipulating Ambrosio). The illustrations I

[60] There are also multiple illustrations of Ambrosio with Lucifer, but they depict different moments: Lucifer manifesting before Ambrosio for the second time, Ambrosio on the verge of signing the fatal contract, Ambrosio praying for mercy on the cliff, and Lucifer holding Ambrosio in the air. The 1998 Penguin edition features a cover image from *Fall of the Damned* by the medieval painter Dirck Bouts the Elder that resembles the latter moment as well. From the secondary plot, representations of the bleeding nun are common.

will compare all freeze the scene in the urgent standoff before Ambrosio surrenders his control over Matilda's fate, and the choice to represent this moment of possibility implies that this is one of the key decisions that determines the course of the novel. Lewis himself stretches this instant into a paragraph, slowing the action as he describes how "[t]he friar's eyes followed with dread the course of the dagger," settling into Ambrosio's gaze as "his eye dwelt" on Matilda's nudity, and evoking the enormity of Ambrosio's fatal abandonment of self-control as "a thousand wild wishes bewildered his imagination."[61] I will show how it is control that comes to the fore when we compare multiple illustrations of the scene, as different artists explore the indeterminacy of this moment when each character holds power over the other, before Ambrosio submits to Matilda's will and his own desire.

The illustrations of Matilda and Ambrosio's struggle of wills suggest dramatically different interpretations of the situation through positioning, gesture, facial expression, and visibility of the dagger. While these illustrations of the scene are truer to the novel than the pulp cover's depiction that I examined earlier, they still sometimes represent it in sentimentalized ways that, at first glance, have little to do with the situation Lewis conveys. As the first editions of *The Monk* were published without any illustrations, the earliest image I found that represents this scene is a watercolor by British artist Charles Reuben Ryley that the Lewis Walpole Library estimates to be from around the time of the novel's publication, 1796.

[61] Matthew Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance* (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1998), 60.

Figure 7: Charles Reuben Ryley's watercolor *The Monk* (ca. 1796), The Lewis Walpole Library, http://images.library.yale.edu/walpoleweb/oneitem.asp?imageId=lwlpr04409. Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

From a distance, a viewer may perceive only a man threatening a woman. Ambrosio leans toward Matilda with arms raised menacingly, and she braces herself and holds up what

appears to be a defensive arm. On closer examination, a viewer could notice the exposed nipple that is nearly camouflaged against the shadow of Matilda's robe, the fact that one of her hands holds open the robe, and the dagger that partially blends into the background foliage. Matilda appears to be composed, looking directly into Ambrosio's agitated face. Because Ambrosio is hunching, their heads and toes are on a level with each other, suggesting parity. In this image, Matilda exposes her right breast, not her left, as in the novel. Though she points the dagger near her heart, the fact that she gratuitously reveals her chest on the opposite side implies that she is tempting him with her sexuality, an artistic interpretation founded in other scenes from the novel. Here, it provides more evidence for the perception that though Matilda initially appears helpless, she is in control of their encounter, subtly undermining Ambrosio's attempts to overpower her.

Even illustrations that use similar compositions suggest drastically different readings of the what is at stake in this moment of indeterminacy. In both images below, the figures appear close together, low in the frame, centered or nearly so, of roughly equal height and on a level with each other, surrounded by the garden.

Figure 8: Anonymous illustration, "Restez, enchanteresse, restez pour ma destruction," from *Le Moine*, translated by Jacques-Marie Deschamps, et. al., Maradan, 1797, 105. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
Figure 9: Jean François Eugène Prudhomme, frontispiece from *Ambrosio; or, The Monk*, William Borradaile, 1822. Source: Z-S L6752 A5, The New York Society Library.

The one on the left is an anonymous engraving from the French Maradan edition of 1797, the earliest illustrated version of the novel I found. Though the page features a caption in which Ambrosio blames his impending doom on Matilda, the image suggests a sentimental serenity. The soft folds of the robes and the stylized grace of the figures' physical attitudes make it appear as if the two are dancing rather than that Ambrosio is attempting to prevent Matilda's suicide. Matilda gazes at Ambrosio with a look that seems adoring while baring both of her breasts, which the engraver renders in sensual detail. The gently rounded, untrimmed trees and shrubs create an Edenic atmosphere. The lone indicator of peril amid

this calm scene is Matilda's dagger, which is well defined but small, thin, and easily ignored. Ambrosio's gaze might be resting on her chest (which it does in the text), and his heavy-lidded eyes negate any sense that he may be alarmed. In contrast, the illustration on the right (from an 1822 American edition by Borradaile, engraved by Jean François Eugène Prudhomme) appears stark and urgent. Ambrosio, instead of being stunned when Matilda raises the dagger, as he is in the text, is rushing to stop her. With his eyes fastened on Matilda's large, prominent dagger, he places his hand on the arm with which she holds it. Matilda's indistinct breast is more legible as the target of the dagger than as the enticement of a lover, and her expression is resolute. Compared to the Maradan illustration's ripples and curves, the lines of the robes and sculpted trees are stiff and forbidding. The former image emphasizes the sensuality of the scene; the latter, its threat, which, unlike the earlier threatening image, portrays Ambrosio not as an aggressor but as Matilda's would-be savior. The first engraving seems to suggest that the most significant outgrowth of this moment in the text is Ambrosio's sexual awakening, an occurrence which the image presents as mutually desired. The second implies that this moment is most important as the seed of the destruction that follows, which it clearly attributes to Matilda.

The two final illustrations I'll consider (not pictured) both highlight the erotic and destructive aspects of the scene, though they imply very different things about Ambrosio's self-control. One is an illustration from an 1891 American edition, one of many in which the story is reprinted with the more sensational title *Rosario; or, The Female Monk*.[62] The illustration, by August Leroy, shows Matilda revealing her breast with a guarded expression and Ambrosio grasping her sleeve with what appears to be a smile, as if he

[62] August Leroy, untitled, in *Rosario; or, The Female Monk*, by Matthew Lewis (New York: Laird, 1891), frontispiece, Archive.org, https://archive.org/details/cu31924013516715.

doesn't notice the poniard Matilda holds. Meanwhile, the knife is pointing at his groin. The last is a woodcut from a 1984 Folio edition illustrated by George Tute, who makes Matilda's voluptuous body the focus of the image.[63] Her white breast against the prevalent darkness draws the eye and makes the point of the dagger pressed to it more conspicuous. Though Matilda holds the knife and the viewer's gaze, Tute positions her below Ambrosio and facing away from the viewer, which could imply that she is less powerful and less important than Ambrosio. He appears impassive, with a grave expression and a palm raised to command her to stop. He holds his other hand up defensively, but it blends in with the folds of his robe and does not diminish the impression of his dominance. In these five illustrations, Matilda appears in turn to be victimized, determined, amorous, desperate, and unreadable. Ambrosio seems to be dangerous, pleasant, distressed, admiring, and forbidding. It may seem that some of these visual interpretations must actually be misinterpretations, but each one, whether straightforward or ambiguous, has a basis in the text's complex negotiation of authority and feeling.

Comparing illustrations in this way has several possible benefits for literary scholars writing about novels like *The Monk*. This practice encourages us to see beyond our own subjective responses to a novel or the limited responses enabled by our current critical norms, because when we are able to view several different interpretations of the same textual moment, we are less likely to conclude that there is only one way to respond to it, as several scholars have done with scenes and characters from *The Monk*. Though the early marketing of *The Monk* as a sentimental work failed due to scandal, sentimentality persists in many illustrations of the novels and invites readings that take Lewis's use of the

[63] George Tute, untitled, in *The Monk*, by Matthew Lewis (London: The Folio Society, 1984), Full Table, https://www.fulltable.com/vts/aoi/t/tute/2.jpeg.

mode seriously. The visual medium allows us to reconsider the emotional portrayals in the text, because it can vivify passages that we may have dismissed because we find the writing too conventional to be effective, as with scholars' responses to Lewis's sentimental and theatrical descriptions. Some scholars have argued that Lewis must have intended these ineffective portrayals to be critiques or parodies, but most illustrations present the text's moments of terror, indecision, and desperation as sincere, making it clear that recent scholarly ways of interpreting the text's emotional qualities have been narrowed by current critical lenses.

Even the act of noticing what passages have been illustrated can be generative, as it may help us determine where others have located the imaginative energy of the text and which moments distill some of the essential dynamics of a novel, as the encounter between Matilda and Ambrosio does. When the same or similar moments from the text have been illustrated multiple times, they can suggest patterns in the novel that we may not have observed. The illustrations of *The Monk* that I found often depict moments of danger and desire, which mirrors the critical focus of scholars and online reviewers. However, seeing multiple visual portrayals of the novel's violence and sex made it clear that nearly all of them feature two characters, and these two characters are most often positioned in ways that emphasize the balance of power between them. And alongside these sensational illustrations are other representations of power between two characters that are neither aggressive nor sexual. In addition to illustrations of Matilda and Ambrosio's confrontation, Ambrosio lusting over Antonia, Ambrosio murdering Elvira and Antonia, and Lucifer carrying Ambrosio to his death, there are images of Agnes pleading with Ambrosio to preserve her secret and Lucifer demanding that Ambrosio sign his demonic contract. With

these latter scenes, and even in many of the more sensational ones, artists often freeze the scene in a moment of decision.

This tendency of illustrations to emphasize choice and complex relational dynamics in *The Monk* differs from illustrations of other gothic novels that I could find, which suggests that these motifs are significant in the novel. The illustrations of Ann Radcliffe's novels that I located are generally of scenes of terror that focus on an individual's experience—the cloaked monk frightening Vivaldi in *The Italian*, Emily fleeing from the black curtain or from the castle of Udolpho, and several images of Emily discovering a corpse. The gothic illustrations collected in Maurice Levy's "Images du Roman Noir" most often portray a clear imbalance of power in which a heroine is imperiled: a woman is carried down a cliffside, threatened atop a gothic castle, menaced by men with weapons, dragged across a room or into a closet.[64] These images of scenes from other gothic novels do not emphasize the struggle in relations of power or the choice in fatal moments the same way images from *The Monk* do, which makes Lewis's situations of possibility worthy of further attention. Though scholars are certainly justified in arguing that the accumulation and amplification of scenes of sex and violence are a defining pattern of *The Monk*, we could also envision the narrative as being built on these moments of choice, in which one character holds tenuous power over the fate of another. Seeking out the moments of decision that illustrators represent allowed me to see many more of them, and to observe that whole scenes contain many moments in which characters vie for control. Thinking in terms of the various illustrated iterations of the same instant prompted me to notice the verbal iterations of control within and among scenes, which made it clear that

[64] Maurice Levy, "Images du Roman Noir," *Die Buchillustration im 18. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980), 156-165.

power in *The Monk* is more complex than scholars have acknowledged. Considering how similar scenes in the novel contain repetition with difference is essential in emphasizing the novel's kaleidoscopic power relations, as well as the struggle, precarity, and choice involved in Ambrosio's downfall, elements that many scholars minimize when they focus on Lewis's authorial control. Even more importantly, what this reading makes clear is that there are more options for discussing feeling in *The Monk* than the current scholarly parameters have allowed us to see.

Rhetorical Power and Contextual Control

Felski's claim that the prevailing scholarly mood of the last several decades has been a suspicious one is especially helpful in considering the way scholars have focused on issues in *The Monk* that harmonize with distrust. Multiple studies analyze the role of characters' various kinds of concealment, which I will address in my discussion of Ann Radcliffe's *Italian* in the next chapter. Even more informative for this chapter's consideration of how scholars have argued that Lewis disallows certain feelings in response to particular scenes is the way scholars have dealt with the issue of control in the novel. Several prominent scholars interpret *The Monk*'s tightly constructed plot of Satanic manipulation or Lewis's ostentatious writing style as evidence that Lucifer and Matilda dictate Ambrosio's actions and Lewis attempts to dictate his readers' responses to an unusual degree. For instance, Maggie Kilgour contends that Lewis "gives the reader a sense of power and control over the narrative" but in reality "keeps us outside, to make us marvel at his authorial powers."[65]

[65] Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 150-151.

David Punter argues that he "tries to be more cynical than his audience, and to dominate it by means of this cynicism."[66] Howells perceives Ambrosio as "powerless to escape from his guilt-ridden obsession" and "caught up in a web of guilt-ridden erotic fantasy."[67] Peter Brooks claims that Lewis builds a fictional world driven by "forces which are both beyond man's control (as they are beyond natural explanation) and yet inhabiting within man, as they inhabit within nature."[68] These scholars and others appear to be showing their own dominance over Lewis by exposing his manipulations, but they are accepting the idea that he allows no autonomy for his characters, similar to how we saw that scholars bridled under and submitted to the novel's tendency toward objectification.

By suspiciously reinforcing the existence of absolute control in the novel, scholars overlook the text's evidence of culpability and possibility. The scholars quoted above insist that Ambrosio is powerless within the narrative despite the fact that he ruins or destroys many lives. Stephen Ahern takes issue with this kind of reading, arguing that "the narrative leaves plenty of room for individual agency."[69] He explains that "the monk's actions cannot be excused as the product of passions beyond his control" because it is Ambrosio's "willful blindness" that dooms him and his moments of uncertainty or regret that had the potential to save him.[70] The text does indeed show that Ambrosio is not powerless. Lewis dramatizes Ambrosio's paralyzing choices and missed opportunities throughout the novel. And yet it is true that Ambrosio also feels compelled. Ahern explains this apparent contradiction with the argument that Lewis is exposing the cruel delusion implicit in the rhetoric of

[66] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, vol. 1 (New York: Longman Publishing, 1996), 80.
[67] Howells, *Love, Mystery and Misery*, 68, 72.
[68] Peter Brooks, "Virtue and Terror: *The Monk*," *ELH* 40, no. 2 (summer 1973): 256, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2872659.
[69] Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities*, 180.
[70] Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities*, 176-180.

sentimental love. However, the rhetoric of desire is only one manifestation of a more pervasive verbal phenomenon in *The Monk*. In this section, I will consider how the novel uses a rhetoric of necessity with which characters attempt to order each other's present and future, and sometimes even past. These characters constantly recontextualize the situation they inhabit, attempting to reorient each other toward a perception of the possibilities and impossibilities that serve them in the moment. After close-reading how they do this, I will suggest that it can provide a model for recontextualizing our own situation as literary critics writing about sensational novels under the current scholarly constraints.

As Napier and several characters in the text point out, the refusal of mercy is the primary sin in the novel.[71] Yet Lewis does not portray his repeated scenes of desperation only as ones in which a powerless person begs for compassion from a hard-hearted and powerful one. In each of these scenes, though one character clearly has more power in the situation and the less powerful character can only ask for mercy, the way that character often does so is by striving for control of the more powerful character's movements, thoughts, and feelings and by claiming the power to narrate events. Kilgour refers to Lucifer, the most influential character, as the "infernal author Satan," but many characters appear to be struggling for authorial control.[72] By looking closely at four of the scenes in which one character has the choice to act either maliciously or forbearingly, I will show that in these crucial moments of decision, both characters repeatedly use grammatical features like verb

[71] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 113-115. Ambrosio even explicitly thinks of his lack of mercy for Agnes as a cause of his suffering when he is confronted with his first moral crisis with Matilda and later when Elvira denies him mercy.
[72] Kilgour, *Rise of the Gothic Novel*, 162.

tense or mood to deploy power. In these exchanges, each one verbally conveys that there is no possibility for choice, even as their competing necessities and inevitabilities demonstrate that there is.

The first of these scenes of contestation occurs early in the novel, when Ambrosio finds Agnes's letter from Raymond planning her escape from the convent and, refusing her pleas for mercy, turns the pregnant nun over to the domina to be punished. This summary implies that Ambrosio holds all the power in the situation, but the scene allows for more complexity. Napier and Ahern have identified Ambrosio's pitilessness and subsequent regret in this scene as formative for his character, and many other scholars have likely overlooked it because of Agnes's theatrical and sentimental emotional displays (throwing herself at Ambrosio's feet, tearing her veil, sinking to the ground and fainting), but closer attention to the verbal exchange between Agnes and Ambrosio reveals the two to be engaged in a struggle for control of the perception of their situation. In this and other scenes, modal auxiliaries (*can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, *would*) suggest whether a future course of action is possible, likely, necessary, inevitable, or recommended. We might expect an ethical negotiation like this one to feature several instances of *could*, *may*, *might*, *should*, and *would*, but here and elsewhere Lewis largely refrains from using these modal verbs and prefers *must*, *shall*, and *will*, making characters speak as if the future is already written while they argue over what that future will be. Another important aspect of this and other such scenes is Lewis's reliance on the imperative mood. Imperatives can be interpreted as pleas, requests, and suggestions, but they always take the form of a command, which, along with the extent to which Agnes seizes control of narrating the

future in this scene, makes her appear to have a great deal of autonomy even as, practically, she has none.

Early in their exchange, Agnes sounds as if she possesses more power than Ambrosio. Ambrosio uses the modal auxiliary *must* to present his own choice as being out of his hands. Against Agnes's objections, he announces, "I must read this letter" and "This letter must to the prioress."[73] He defers to authority to decide his behavior, as if his future actions have already been dictated by the rules of the Church. He uses few imperatives, and only physical ones like "stay" and "hold."[74] Agnes also uses physical imperatives ("Hold"; "Restore my letter"), but she additionally demands his attention ("Hear me") and tells him to "think" and most frequently to feel, demanding that he take pity on her.[75] Though Agnes is imploring, she is also commanding him to feel and act in a certain way and asserting her own idea of the future: "Father, compassionate my youth! Look with indulgence on a woman's weakness, and deign to conceal my frailty! The remainder of my life shall be employed in expiating this single fault, and your lenity will bring back a soul to heaven!"[76] Her use of the modal verbs *shall* and *will* rather than the more pleading *could* suggests that the situation has already been resolved in her favor and the fate she describes is a certainty rather than being reliant on Ambrosio's unlikely mercy.

As Agnes claims narrative control, Ambrosio resists. He uses rhetorical questions to demonstrate his imperviousness to her demands for compassion, responding in a manner intended to shut down dialogue and distort her version of the future to reflect his own perspective: "What! shall St Clare's convent become the retreat of prostitutes? Shall I suffer

[73] Lewis, *Monk*, 43, 44.
[74] Lewis, *Monk*, 43.
[75] Lewis, *Monk*, 44-46.
[76] Lewis, *Monk*, 44.

the church of Christ to cherish in its bosom debauchery and shame?"[77] Whereas Agnes used *shall* in the sense of *will* to denote necessity in her version of the future, Ambrosio uses *shall* in the sense of *ought* to reframe her necessary future as her ridiculous misconception of what is appropriate. Agnes responds by redoubling her imperatives for Ambrosio to heed her and take pity on her and her unborn child and then assures him, "If you discover my imprudence to the domina, both of us are lost," using the form of a factual conditional statement to represent the deadly consequence of his intended action for her and her baby as a fact so incontrovertible and emergent it deserves the present tense.[78] He again deflects with a scornful rhetorical question and counters with his own narrative of the future: "Shall *I* conceal your crime—*I* whom you have deceived by your false confession?—No, daughter, no. I will render you a more essential service. I will rescue you from perdition, in spite of yourself. Penance and mortification shall expiate your offence, and severity force you back to the path of holiness."[79] His emphasized first-person pronoun repossesses his agency from Agnes, and he reasserts his control of his future and hers, characterizing himself as a holy hero in a narrative of her salvation.

As Agnes is about to be carried away, she has lost the ability to affect her fate, but retains the ability to affect Ambrosio's sense of what has happened. She reclaims their narrative, recasting the present and future as the fatal past: "You could have saved me; you could have restored me to happiness and virtue; but would not; you are the destroyer of my soul; you are my murderer, and on you fall the curse of my death and my unborn

[77] Lewis, *Monk*, 44.
[78] Lewis, *Monk*, 45.
[79] Lewis, *Monk*, 45.

infant's!"[80] She rejects his formulations in which he either has no choice or acts heroically, retelling their story as one in which he is clearly at fault, substituting *could* and *would* for his *must* and *will*. She then predicts a future in which he will be punished by God for his cruelty and delivers her final command to him, that when that time comes, he "think upon Agnes, and despair of pardon."[81] Her words wound Ambrosio, as he suffers "[a] secret pang at his heart," and Matilda soon gives him reason to shout in torment, "Agnes! Agnes! . . . I already feel thy curse!"[82]

The second scene I'll consider is the one where Matilda reveals herself as a woman and convinces Ambrosio not to report her, and it is the only one in the novel in which a supplicant obtains mercy. Süner and other scholars have focused on the sensational moment when Matilda exposes her breast and Ambrosio becomes paralyzed by lustful indecision, but before this moment there are many others in which their power struggle is more verbal than physical. Max Fincher argues that Matilda's rhetorical effectiveness in this scene is the first example in the novel of the recurring figure of the woman who verbally dominates men.[83] When examining her rhetoric, though, we can see that it is very similar to Agnes's from the previous scene and to Ambrosio's own—the main difference is that she gives no ground in their verbal competition for control over the narrative. Matilda uses imperatives at least eighteen times in the scene, covering a full range of orders, including the physical ("hold"), attentional ("listen"), intellectual ("think"), and emotional ("call up . . . compassion").[84] Meanwhile, Ambrosio, shaken, gives no commands for some pages,

[80] Lewis, *Monk*, 46.
[81] Lewis, *Monk*, 46.
[82] Lewis, *Monk*, 46, 62.
[83] Fincher, *Queering Gothic*, 93.
[84] Lewis, *Monk*, 54-58.

deferring to authority that he claims forecloses his ability to veer from the course of action that is dictated by the Church. He tells her, "I feel that duty obliges my treating you with harshness; I must reject your prayer . . . the laws of our order forbid your stay . . . my vows will oblige me to declare your story to the community. You must from hence."[85] He maintains that the Church has already decided his future actions, but he also shows discomfort with his cruel choice by tempering his certainty somewhat ("I feel that") and disclaiming his responsibility further by making duty, vows, and religious laws the subjects of his statements.

Matilda verbally outmatches Ambrosio at every turn. As Ambrosio softens his resolve, he also softens the rebuking rhetorical questions he used to resist Agnes's vision of the future, now sounding equally searching and disapproving: "can you really hope for my permission to remain among us? Even if I were to grant your request, what good could you derive from it?"[86] His use of the subjunctive mood still suggests that it would be impossible for him to allow her to stay, but he seems both curious and concerned, lacking the contempt he demonstrated in his questions to Agnes. Matilda, in contrast, transitions easily from a rhetorical question freighted with criticism to an accusatory dismissal of his stated intentions to a vivid evocation of her preferred future and a declaration of virtuous love: "Can you be less generous than I thought you? I will not suspect it. You will not drive a wretch to despair; I shall still be permitted to see you . . . and, when we expire, our bodies shall rest in the same grave."[87] When Ambrosio attempts to harden his resolve, she threatens to kill herself, and her physical threat is made more credible by the present

[85] Lewis, *Monk*, 59.
[86] Lewis, *Monk*, 57.
[87] Lewis, *Monk*, 57.

tense: “the moment that you leave me, I plunge this steel into my heart”; “Tell me that you will conceal my story; that I shall remain your friend and your companion, or this poniard drinks my blood.”[88] In her (ultimately successful) attempts to gain control of the situation, Matilda reaches extremes that Agnes and Ambrosio do not, but her verbal techniques are only an amplification of theirs, not a display of aberrant feminine (or demonic) power.

The third of these scenes, in which Ambrosio rapes Antonia, has drawn scholarly attention for the horrific way Lewis portrays the rape, but the scene is also significant in showing Antonia’s comparative rhetorical weakness and, notably, Lewis’s suppression of most of her speech. Whereas we see Agnes and Matilda using several imperatives to command Ambrosio’s attention, contemplation, and compassion, Antonia’s quoted imperatives are few and usually physical, and rather than commanding Ambrosio’s body alone (like Agnes and Matilda’s “stay” and “hold”), Antonia’s physical imperatives generally make herself the object of the demand, as she tells him, “Let me go!”; “take me from hence!”; “Unhand me”; “Convey me from hence”; “Let me return to the house.”[89] This difference in imperatives is understandable, considering that in the previous scenes the threat to the women was that Ambrosio would leave to report them and here it is that he would stay; even so, this verbal acknowledgment of his power over her own body detracts from the authority of her commands. She further diminishes her importance by demanding mercy “for God’s sake” rather than for her own.[90] Though she asserts a certain future when she informs him, “[S]tay here one moment longer, I neither will nor ought,” this claim is so uncharacteristic that “[t]hough the monk was somewhat startled by the resolute tone in

[88] Lewis, *Monk*, 59, 60.
[89] Lewis, *Monk*, 326-327.
[90] Lewis, *Monk*, 326, as well as in the first scene in which he attempts to rape her, 225.

which this speech was delivered, it produced upon him no other effect than surprise."[91] After Lewis has established that Antonia possesses no control over the narrative, he becomes as inattentive to her words as Ambrosio is. He merely references her attempts to prevent Ambrosio from raping her: she "once more had recourse to prayers and supplications. This attempt had no better success than the former"; Ambrosio is "[h]eedless of her tears, cries and entreaties."[92] Even after the rape, when she nearly convinces Ambrosio to set her free with her persuasive description of a future that would spare him punishment, Lewis uses only indirect speech: "she besought his compassion in terms the most pathetic and urgent . . . she offered to quit Madrid immediately. Her entreaties were so urgent as to make a considerable impression upon the monk."[93] In what is potentially Antonia's most powerful moment in the novel, in which she convincingly narrates a future for herself that does not end in murder, Lewis uses his own narrative control to suppress hers.

Meanwhile, Ambrosio's speech illustrates his transformation from a holy man to a libertine, but it also reveals the continuity in his character. Whereas previously he used the modal auxiliary *must* to defer to the rules of Catholicism, now he uses it to defer instead to the rules of lust. He defends his intention to deflower Antonia by claiming, "I burn with desires which I must either gratify or die," and commands her, "let me . . . teach you to feel those pleasures in my arms, which I must soon enjoy in yours."[94] Just as he previously represented his future actions as being predetermined by religious mandates in order to avoid owning his choices to expose Agnes and Matilda, now he depicts the inevitability of

[91] Lewis, *Monk*, 327.
[92] Lewis, *Monk*, 328.
[93] Lewis, *Monk*, 332.
[94] Lewis, *Monk*, 327.

his choice to rape Antonia, as if his only real choice was to rape or to die. To argue, as Brooks does, "that Ambrosio's drama is in fact the story of his relationship to the imperatives of desire" seems to be endorsing Ambrosio's own rhetoric of necessity, which has been proven false before.[95] And just as Ambrosio previously used his narrative power to distort others' visions of the future into what sound like impossible and unacceptable proposals and to deny responsibility for his destructive choices, he does these things again when refusing to grant Antonia her request to return home after he rapes her. He rages, "What? That you may denounce me to the world? that you may proclaim me a hypocrite, a ravisher, a betrayer, a monster of cruelty, lust, and ingratitude? No, no, no! . . . Wretched girl, you must stay here with me! . . . Have you not plunged my soul into infamy? . . . 'tis you who will cause my eternal anguish!—you, wretched girl! you! you!'[96]

The final scene I will analyze is the climactic interaction between Ambrosio and Lucifer, when Lucifer offers to save Ambrosio from the Inquisition in exchange for his soul but ultimately kills him. Scholars have focused on the gruesomeness and biblical language of Lewis's description of Ambrosio's suffering and death, but it is also worthwhile to consider what precedes this horror as the culmination of the novel's repeated assertions and denials of control. In this scene, Lucifer reveals himself to be the supreme master of Ambrosio's narrative, but Lewis undermines Ambrosio's claims that he has had no choice in his actions. Lucifer deploys Ambrosio's own preferred style of accusatory rhetorical questions and statements of inevitability: "Are you not guilty? Can such enormous sins be forgiven? Hope you to escape my power? Your fate is already pronounced . . . mine you

[95] Lewis, *Monk*, 257.
[96] Lewis, *Monk*, 329-330.

must and shall be."[97] He revises Ambrosio's understanding of what he has done by disclosing that it was his mother whom he murdered and his sister whom he raped, commanding him to "tremble at the extent of your offences!"[98] He even claims authorship of the events that led to Ambrosio's sins, revealing, "It was I who threw Matilda in your way; it was I who gave you entrance to Antonia's chamber."[99] In possession of demonic power, Lucifer can influence the course of Ambrosio's life and his perception of the past and future, easily achieving the narrative control that the other characters have been vying for. Yet despite Lucifer's considerable sway over Ambrosio's fate, Lewis suggests that the idea of inevitability is often fictive. When Lucifer presents Ambrosio with the choice to sign his contract and formally renounce his soul or to wait to be tortured and nonetheless face what Lucifer states is his inescapable spiritual doom, Ambrosio still attempts to control the situation by ordering Lucifer away and insisting that he "will not sign the parchment."[100] Even as his determination fades when confronted with the same rhetoric of inevitability to which he has subjected others, he still tries to disclaim responsibility for his actions. But even though he attempts to take refuge in terms of necessity, he ends by taking ownership of his decision: "I must—Fate urges me—I accept your conditions."[101] Once Ambrosio is in his power, Lucifer insists upon Ambrosio's guilt as he simultaneously takes credit for

[97] Lewis, *Monk*, 370. This declaration eerily echoes Ambrosio's words to the drugged Antonia: "Before the break of day, mine you must, and mine you shall be!" (325). Steven Blakemore reads this repetition as one of many instances in which Lewis blurs sexuality and religion. Steven Blakemore, "Matthew Lewis's Black Mass: Sexual, Religious Inversion in 'The Monk,'" *Studies in the Novel* 30, no. 4 (1998): 521-539, http://www.jstor.org/stable/29533296. More pertinent to my analysis is the way Lewis uses the repetition to emphasize how Ambrosio's tendency to insist upon the inevitability of his cruel actions ultimately redounds upon him. When Ambrosio experiences his own final instance of despair, Lucifer uses *must* to defer to destiny in the same way Ambrosio previously used it to defer to the laws of the Church or desire.

[98] Lewis, *Monk*, 375. In the same scene, the narrator refers to Ambrosio as "the trembler," reducing his personhood to his expression of emotion and aligning him with Antonia in the first scene of attempted rape, the only time any other character is called a "trembler" (372, 225).

[99] Lewis, *Monk*, 375.

[100] Lewis, *Monk*, 371.

[101] Lewis, *Monk*, 372.

tempting him, and he even castigates Ambrosio for his mercilessness. Finally, before wrecking Ambrosio's body and soul, he reveals that right up until the moment Ambrosio signed the document, he had the opportunity to escape his doom, as the Inquisition had pardoned him. He tells Ambrosio, "Had you resisted me one minute longer, you had saved your body and soul," presenting him with an alternate version of events that is now foreclosed, in the form of a counterfactual conditional, but using the past perfect tense in a way that cruelly evokes the reality of his salvation, as if it had actually happened in some other timeline.[102] The novel ends with the suggestion that even in a narrative full of apparent inevitability, no conclusion is truly foregone.

My reading of *The Monk* above is simply that—my reading. I don't claim that my way is the only way to interpret these scenes, but I do argue that it offers a perspective that hasn't been included in the critical conversation so far. The critical conversation about *The Monk* has been shaped by many competing forces, including its failed presentation as a Radcliffean sentimental gothic novel and its early scandal, as well as its competing marketing as a sensational work and an abstracted classic. The work of publishers and scholars that validated *The Monk* as an object of analysis has often included minimizing the ways the novel is sensational. When scholars have written about its sensational qualities, they have produced readings that are uncomfortably situated within the limited critical approaches to novelistic feeling. Critical objections to *The Monk*'s sensationalism can overstate its negative consequences and end up implying that Lewis forces all his readers to become voyeurs and dehumanizers. Close readings, on the other hand, can elide

[102] Lewis, *Monk*, 375.

appreciation of Lewis's style and his lustful or brutal subject matter, making these scholars sound startlingly like amateur critics who write about their approval of Antonia's rape and murder.

Even though I found a way to write about *The Monk*'s emotional scenes without falling into these critical traps, I still found myself limited by critical attitudes. After considering several sentimental illustrations from *The Monk*, I planned to write about the sentimentality of the novel—the way characters repeatedly find themselves physically incapacitated by emotion. Unlike many scholars, I experience these moments as affecting, even though they are conventional. Yet, I knew that building an argument around this response would mean confronting other scholars' insistence that these moments are insignificant, false, or parodic, and that sentimentality itself is embarrassing at best and unethical at worst. Deborah Knight provocatively challenges philosophical and critical dismissals of sentimentality by arguing that they actually replicate what they dismiss by being clichéd and reductive and taking pleasure in performing virtue.[103] Of course, there are truly objectionable features of the sentimental mode. Ahern writes that "[t]he tragedy of the sentimental mode of being results from failure to recognize that one's version of reality is a lie, which if enforced by a bearer of power is done at the expense of others."[104] As bearers of critical power, if we wish to challenge the overreach of sentimentality and other forms that encourage objectification, we should also make sure that we are not actually reinforcing objectification or projecting our own reality onto others.

In the same way that Lewis's characters contest the narratives of reality that others project onto them and recontextualize their situations, we have the ability to contest the

[103] Knight, "Why We Enjoy Condemning Sentimentality."
[104] Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities*, 189.

critical narratives that we have inherited and attempt to resituate ourselves more comfortably as literary scholars writing about emotion. One way to do this is by stepping outside of our own preferred medium to gain perspective. Approaching *The Monk* through its images—book covers and illustrations—allowed me to temporarily disentangle myself from my own disciplinary constraints. It also offered a different set of interpretations than the ones I found in scholarly treatments of the novel, as did reading online reviews. Those interpretations were not scholarly, and I don't mean to claim that that fact makes them somehow purer in their affect, a myth that Deidre Lynch dispels in her study of the historically produced love of literature that has defined the reading practices of scholars and amateurs alike.[105] But non-scholarly interpretations have the benefit of being less limited by the affective norms of criticism. Even Rita Felski offers only a modest remedy for scholarly feeling beyond suspicion in her suggestion that critics approach texts "as energetic coactors and vital partners in an equal encounter."[106] Felski draws on actor-network theory in this formulation, but she acknowledges that her choice to focus on the relationship between readers and texts while excluding the many other coactors involved in this relationship is not in line with ANT's consideration of multiple mediators.[107] By involving more participants in my discussion of *The Monk*—advertisements, publishers, newspapers, critics from different eras with different professional statuses, book jackets, illustrations—I am attempting to account for more of the novel's uncomfortable situation in scholarship today, and to offer more possibilities for us to reorient ourselves with different critical moods.

[105] Deidre Shauna Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), ProQuest Ebrary.
[106] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 185.
[107] Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 183-184.

CHAPTER 3

Sweet Emotion: *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Emotional Taste

Elizabeth J. Mathews

> "[T]he emotions of love, pity, grief, and anguish, are described with inimitable delicacy."
> —*Analytical Review*, 1794
>
> "The main character, Emily, cries over just about anything [. . .] Find your spine woman! Embroider a hanky, cease and desist from the incessant tears, near tears, tearing up, or just thinking about tears."
> —Carole la Nasa, Amazon, 2014
>
> "The Italian takes the ladies first to Venice, and afterwards to his Castle of Udolpho, the mysteries of which do indeed *harrow up the soul*."
> —*British Critic*, 1794
>
> "Anyway there are like two or three spooky castles in *Mysteries of Udolpho,* I lost count, and who knows how many lengthy descriptions of unpleasant weather, and not a small amount of fainting.
> And she manages to make all that just spectacularly boring, which is really sortof an achievement, but not one to be proud of."
> —Alex, Goodreads, 2014

In the 220 years that elapsed between the first two reviews of Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and the two online reviews quoted above, a fundamental shift has occurred in responses to the novel. Effusions of admiration for Radcliffe's ability to represent her characters' emotions appropriately have given way to irritated complaints about her heroine's expressions of fear and grief. Plot events and supernatural descriptions that used to keep readers rapt and even terrified now blur together and merely bore. As I discussed in chapter 1, we can attribute some of this phenomenon to the fact that sentimental gothic novels like Radcliffe's can now be read primarily in terms of formula, which makes repetitive features like castles and tears more obvious, less interesting, and less affecting.

But this particular instance is more complicated: whereas *The Castle of Wolfenbach*, Eliza Parsons's novel that I analyzed in chapter 1, has been read as a derivative novel from its publication to now, Radcliffe's *Udolpho* was once acclaimed as original, nuanced, tasteful writing, largely because of the way she managed readers' emotions.

However, after a certain point in time an extensive range of writers looking back on Radcliffe's literary contributions began to criticize her writing for reasons that appear to be emotional: in 1845 Scottish historian and essayist Archibald Alison describes her works as "now wellnigh unreadable"; in 1852 the U.S. women's magazine *Godey's* insists that they have become "insufferably tedious to our modern tastes"; a biographical dictionary edited by poet Stanley Kunitz and Howard Haycraft in 1952 argues that they are "practically unreadable today" in part because of their "dreary succession of trials of a persecuted heroine, conventionally represented"; in 1954 Walter Allen, in his history of the English novel, reads the heroine of *Udolpho* in particular as more of an emotional type than a character, calling her "incarnate sensibility"; in 1965 another literary historian writes that "it can still be debated whether [the bad taste of Radcliffe's era] explains her romances or the romances explain the bad taste"; and in 1968 critic Northrop Frye writes of her gothic heroines, "We may wonder why any literary convention should have produced these absurd creatures, drizzling like a Scotch mist and fainting at every crisis in the plot."[1] These assessments show a widespread distaste for Radcliffe's novels, venturing beyond accounts

[1] Archibald Alison, "The Historical Romance," *Essays*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1850 [first published 1845]), 529; "Anecdote of Mrs. Radcliffe," *Godey's Magazine* 45 (1852): 227; Stanley Kunitz and Howard Haycroft, eds., "Radcliffe, Mrs. Ann (Ward)," *British Authors before 1800: A Biographical Dictionary* (New York: H. W. Wilson Company), 427; Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1954), 101; Harrison R. Steeves, *Before Jane Austen: The Shaping of the English Novel in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965); Northrup Frye, *A Study in English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), 29; all qtd. in Deborah D. Rogers, *Ann Radcliffe: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 70, 72, 99, 100, 105, 106.

of personal response to speak for all readers of their time and attributing the inability of readers to enjoy or even understand her novels to the way she depicts emotion. They may employ some of the emotional pedagogy I described in chapter 1, as perhaps earlier critics teach later critics to categorize Radcliffe's novels as tedious assemblages of tears and fainting. They may also be reading Radcliffe in opposition to Matthew Lewis's powerful, masculinized style, as I discussed in the previous chapter. But more importantly for this chapter, they also show awareness of a historical change in the way Radcliffe has been read, a change that makes her novels and the readers that adored them incomprehensible and raises questions about literary representations of emotion, and about literary taste in general.

It is this historical change and these questions about literary emotion and taste that I will address in this chapter. The feelings readers express about the emotional situations in novels[2] can change in traceable ways over time and across cultures. These culturally variable attitudes toward affective circumstances in literature could be called "emotional taste." The emotional taste that I will illustrate offers a way to track carefully and elucidate intricate shifts in reception.[3] Thinking in terms of emotional taste will allow us to analyze changes in Radcliffe's reception that other reception histories have been unable to see or explain. Focusing on feeling allows for concentrated comparison of reviews by periodical critics of different eras, scholars who perform literary analysis, and amateur online reviewers, since all of these critics may express emotion to varying degrees, and as I

[2] For an excellent articulation of the complexity of the emotional situations of literary fiction, see Daniel M. Gross, *Uncomfortable Situations: Emotion between Science and the Humanities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[3] The idea of an emotional taste, while unspecified in American literary studies, exists in the concept of rasa, used in Indian aesthetic theory. Rasa (juice or sap) is the feeling that an audience tastes when experiencing dance-drama. Because of its universalist nature, the theory is different from the model of emotional taste that I propose.

demonstrated in the previous chapters, there is sometimes similarity in emotional response across professional and amateur criticism if we account for differences in the emotional conventions of different genres of criticism. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how a consideration of emotional taste enables us to trace historically specific trends in emotional response to *Udolpho* with the ultimate goal of enriching our understanding of the differences between the values the novel expresses and the values of different groups of critics.

To begin this attempt at understanding, I will first indicate how the idea of emotional taste could be valuable to scholars by describing the holes that remain in theories of aesthetic taste and in reception histories of Radcliffe's novels. After showing the extent to which critics diverge in their attitudes toward the emotional situations of *Udolpho* in ways that have not yet been explained adequately, I will follow a compelling trend in these emotional responses in an attempt to provide a more thorough justification for the historically variable feelings *Udolpho* evokes. Delving deeply into one of Radcliffe's linguistic choices to which her reception pointed me, I will argue that Radcliffe's use of the word *sweet* in *Udolpho* establishes an association with gendered emotional receptivity and influence in the novel. This association could explain some of the more drastic changes in the novel's emotional responses over time when considered in conjunction with the history of sweetness and the rather different reception and emotional situations of her novel *The Italian*. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of emotional taste and its potential as a way to move forward in reception studies.

Emotional Taste

Advocating for attention to "emotional taste" may seem unnecessary when we already have volumes of theoretical writings on "taste" as discernment, the mental faculty that governs aesthetic preferences. Yet, most of these writings on taste as discernment devote very little attention to its affective components, and they tend to deemphasize variation. A handful of influential philosophers of taste like David Hume and Immanuel Kant do address personal feeling, and Hume in particular attends to the way cultural differences affect taste, but even these writers ultimately subordinate these complicating issues and join the mass of other eighteenth-century philosophers in advancing a disinterested, universal concept of good taste.[4] In the twentieth century, Pierre Bourdieu contests this emphasis on disinterest and universality by concentrating on the way good taste works in service of social distinctions. Bourdieu's contribution, while it has expanded our ability to analyze the social and economic functions of discernment, has continued to minimize the importance of feeling and history in determining aesthetic judgments. The prevalence of Bourdieu's ideas among scholars today has led to blind spots in our consideration of taste.[5] In a recent article in *New Literary History*, Ben Highmore attempts to direct a discussion of taste away from Bourdieu's distinction, which limits what the concept of taste can address to objects that

[4] Denise Gigante's *Taste* offers a compelling account of the manner in which eighteenth-century taste attempted to distance tasteful subjects and objects from the associated processes of metaphorical gorging, digesting, and excreting. This distance allows taste to align with classed moderation and shared ideals and become remote from excess and animality, though taste as an embodied (and therefore potentially feminized) concept and as a feature of the consumption of commodities caused a lingering threat. Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

[5] And further, most studies of taste today have migrated to the social and economic realm even more thoroughly, as nearly all recent scholarly articles on taste are research on marketing. For a history of taste that includes present-day consumerism, see Luca Vercelloni, *The Invention of Taste: A Cultural Account of Desire, Delight and Disgust in Fashion, Food and Art*, trans. Kate Singleton (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

contribute to social and economic power. Bourdieu's taste, Highmore writes, cannot investigate larger cultural differences in taste, such as national or historical trends, and it also cannot explore smaller personal predilections, like a fondness for one John Coltrane album versus another. Highmore advocates instead for building on the idea of "taste as feeling," a fuller range of preferences and affective entanglements than most treatments of taste acknowledge.[6] If we attend more to the material and affective aspects of taste, Highmore suggests, we can better understand *how* and *why* taste functions.

Since its publication more than two centuries ago, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* has undergone several changes in critical value, and the *how* and *why* of these changes is currently understood through broad explanations only. Deborah Rogers, the most thorough of scholars on Radcliffe's critical reception, explains the writer's shifting popularity in terms of literary and other cultural changes that took place: Radcliffe was respected while she was alive and after her 1823 death earned somewhat backhanded praise from the eminent Sir Walter Scott as the "first poetess of romantic fiction, if actual rythm shall not be deemed essential to poetry."[7] Though Radcliffe had gained renown as a somewhat skillful artist within a lesser genre, her posthumous reputation suffered from association with other, less admired writers of sentimental gothic novels (Eliza Parsons and other Minerva novelists among them).[8] She gained some recognition for her contribution to the literary movement that became romanticism, even as her style began to seem dated shortly after her death.[9] Rogers finds that scholars of the twentieth century appreciated Radcliffe's

[6] Ben Highmore, "Taste as Feeling," *New Literary History* 47, no. 4 (Autumn 2016), doi: 10.1353/nlh.2016.0029.
[7] Sir Walter Scott, "Prefatory Memoir to Mrs. Ann Radcliffe," *The Novels of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe* (London: Hurst, Robinson, and Co., 1824), iv, qtd. in Deborah D. Rogers, introduction to *The Critical Response to Ann Radcliffe*, ed. Deborah D. Rogers (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994): xxi.
[8] Rogers, *Critical Response*, xxi.
[9] Rogers, *Critical Response*, xxii.

influence on literary history even more than their predecessors, though sexism toward early women writers made her a frequent target of mockery in the first half of that century. She credits feminists with revitalizing scholarship on Radcliffe, and while her reception history ends in the 1990s, this narrative accounts for many of the cultural forces that have affected responses to her work.[10]

While Rogers's explanations are persuasive, they leave several questions unanswered: Why does Radcliffe's work seem dated, while romantic poetry does not to the same extent? If it was only Radcliffe's identity as a female writer that invited contempt, why do so many disdainful critics specifically address the novel's emotional style, focusing especially on its tormented heroine? For example, at the end of the Victorian era, the scholar Henry Augustin Beers mockingly writes that Emily is "perpetually sighing, blushing, trembling, weeping, fainting."[11] Several decades later, a reviewer in *Time* asserts, "if in 1794 [Emily's] virginal vaporings came on as symptoms of high sensibility, in 1966, they come off as conventions of high comedy."[12] If it was only the rampant sexism of the early twentieth century that made Radcliffe an object of scorn, why do readers ridicule her now?

Reception histories like Rogers's that attend to literary trends and broader cultural changes help us contextualize readers, but they often have difficulty locating textual explanations for differing responses beyond the obvious ones. For example, Rogers attributes some of the negative emotional responses that appear in *Udolpho*'s criticism, such as shame, irritation, and even anger, to Radcliffe's use of the explained supernatural.[13]

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[10] Rogers, *Critical Response*, xxiii.
[11] Henry Augustin Beers, *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1899), 252-53, Google Books.
[12] "Extricating Emily," *Time* 22 (April 1966): 88, qtd. in Rogers, *Bio-Bibliography*, 105.
[13] Rogers, *Critical Response*, xxxiii.

But what about the responses that are not so easily justified by this plot device? In my own reading of *Udolpho*'s reviews, I have noticed that some aspects of the novel's craft have provoked similar responses over time, while others have been more controversial. For instance, readers have consistently criticized Radcliffe's anachronisms, and they have both praised and censured her poetry and scenic descriptions, regardless of era. However, over time, readers' criticism of the novel's characterization and emotional expressions has intensified. Why do some critical assessments remain the same as others change? And why do some judgments seem like visceral negative responses?

Jane Tompkins's study of American fiction in *Sensational Designs* offers another set of cultural explanations that go somewhat further toward explaining Radcliffe's altered reception. Tompkins observes that when novels by women become popular, their very popularity invites criticism,[14] which could be at play with Radcliffe, a female writer in a popular genre and one who was once ubiquitous, though this explanation makes less sense when we consider that she had fallen out of fashion long before modern critics began to deride her. Unlike *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one of the novels Tompkins considers, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* has not remained required reading, and critics began noting that Radcliffe was no longer read half a century before Beers mocked her heroines. More helpfully, Tompkins argues that the tendency of modern critics to regard with suspicion novels that try to affect readers is partially responsible for the way readers turned against nineteenth-century sentimental and sensational novels in the twentieth century. Something like this hypothesis could explain why *Udolpho*'s heroine, Emily St. Aubert, whose "function in the novel is simply to feel, to feel the appropriate emotions of wonder, awe, and terror" in order to cue

[14] Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), xiv.

the same response for the reader, according to one mid-twentieth-century scholar,[15] began to be the target for much of the criticism at the end of the nineteenth century. It does not, however, explain why the humorous contempt expressed toward Emily by the Victorian scholar and midcentury *Time* critic above transforms into the violent annoyance and even rage that we can observe in some recent online amateur reviews, which reveal one reader claiming to find the novel humorous in a "slapping the heroine" way and another writing to Emily, "STOP CRYING YOU STUPID WHINY BITCH."[16] A modern mistrust of emotional manipulation might make the heroine's frequent tears distasteful and even amusing, but why would some of today's readers take a two-hundred-year-old fictional character's sentiment personally enough to express such virulent disgust, a feeling that does not jibe with a modern, detached mode?

Tompkins and Rogers sketch the outlines of the cultural changes that can account for changed receptions, but we need look more closely, at both the responses and the text, to seek the answers to the remaining questions, and thinking in terms of emotional taste allows us to do so. Because *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is a novel that attempts to evoke affective responses in the reader, contains numerous emotional situations, and has elicited critical responses that foreground those aspects of the text and often express emotion themselves, it makes sense to isolate these affective features when considering its reception. As I sought to understand how the emotional taste for *Udolpho* has altered over time, I noted any reviews that featured demonstrably emotional language, which allowed

[15] Allen, *English Novel*, 101.
[16] Sara Giacalone, review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe, Goodreads, January 14, 2003, https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/506830572/; Abi, review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe, Goodreads, October 16, 2009, http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/93134.The_Mysteries_of_Udolpho.

me to observe how the tone of the responses changed dramatically across decades and centuries and to track the emotional features of Radcliffe's work that the reviews mentioned. For other scholars wishing to focus on emotional taste, this in itself should be helpful: a way to narrow our focus in order to follow shifts in emotional response to literature, which can then be compared productively. This close comparison across a span of time allows us to raise questions that were not available before. Emotional response to literature is so complex that we will never have solid answers to these questions, but by making visible the strange phenomena that attend emotional taste, we have the option of using literary and historical analysis to explore hypothetical explanations that are more grounded in the specifics of the text and contexts. When reading across reviews that reveal changes in emotional taste through their marked differences of tone and attitude toward emotional situations, we may be able to detect a distinct quality in many of the reviews that allows us to seek explanations for these responses beyond what the critics state explicitly. The use of certain patterns of diction could guide us to an overlooked feature of the text that we can see as particularly evocative when considered in conjunction with the criticism. Thus far I have identified some particular ways that emotional taste—expressed feelings about expressions of feeling—for *The Mysteries of Udolpho* has changed over time. Now, I will consider the language of some of the novel's reviews, which offers a way into the close reading and historical analysis that will illuminate the novel's emotional dynamics.

As I scanned reviews of *Udolpho*, paying particular attention to affective language, I noticed a trend in the phrasing of the most expressive reviews up until the Victorian era: a number of reviews suggest emotional experiences through the language of eating. An early reviewer who is perhaps Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes that "curiosity is a kind of

appetite, and hurries headlong on, impatient for its complete gratification"[17] but in *Udolpho*, "it is raised so high that no adequate gratification can be given it."[18] A few decades after publication, Jane Austen's Catherine Morland even achieves maturity when she can look back with regret on the harm she caused because she was "craving to be frightened" after "indulg[ing]" in Radcliffe's novels.[19] In the early Victorian Era, according to one reviewer of a realistically frightening volume of poetry, Radcliffe's terrors had come to seem like "cakes and gingerbread."[20] An admirer of historical romance writes of Radcliffe's early audience, "I am at a loss to account for that taste that loved to sup so full of horrors."[21] These reviews comparing Radcliffe's works to edibles taper off during the period she became less popular, and when modern critics return to Radcliffe's novels, they do not use the language of consumption to describe them. The earlier gastronomical phrasing could be explained by noting that it was conventional to describe certain kinds of fiction, especially formulaic gothic, as food, with journals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries featuring "recipes" for gothic novels. But why is *Udolpho*, of all Radcliffe's works, disproportionately the subject of these criticisms that make use of eating metaphors? I wondered if I could find a textual explanation, and whether it might offer a window into the changes in emotional taste that I had observed. What I discovered is that in addition to thinking about emotional taste as a mode of feeling-based discernment about feelings in literature, it can also be revealing to imagine that those literary feelings have an emotional

[17] Review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by Ann Radcliffe, the *Critical Review, Or, The Annals of Literature* (August 1794), 369, Google Books.
[18] *Critical Review,* 362.
[19] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (New York: Random House, 2006), 166.
[20] Review of *The Outcast, and Other Poems*, by S. G. Goodrich, the *American Monthly Magazine* 6 (1836), 522, qtd. in Rogers, *Bio-Bibliography*, 66.
[21] Robert L. Wade, "The Circulating Library," In *The Columbian Magazine* 3-4, ed. John Inman and Robert A. West (New York: Israel Post, 1845), 89, Google Books.

"flavor"—an identifiable quality in some of the emotional situations that readers respond to differently depending on their preferences and cultural habituation.

Taking a cue from the reviews' language of eating, I searched *Udolpho* for the five basic taste words and discovered no mention of savory, salty, or sour in the novel. *Bitter* appears fifteen times—Emily cries bitter tears; her lover, Valancourt, suffers bitter regrets. Bitterness composes only a minor gustatory note in the novel, which is surprising considering that Edmund Burke, whose descriptions of sublimity inform Radcliffe's work, aligns bitterness with sublimity and sweetness with relaxation, which is a state rarely experienced in *Udolpho*. Radcliffe uses the word *sweet*, however, 131 times. We can compare this to *Gaston de Blondeville*, Radcliffe's other four-volume work, in which sweet appears only 33 times. Amid *Udolpho*'s apprehension, fear, and despair, sweetness pervades, making it an element of the work that readers would find difficult to ignore. Analyzing Radcliffe's sweetness reveals the necessity of the word in her portrayal of an idealized form of feminized sensibility and persuasion. By closely considering this portrayal, we can attempt to explain the historically variable emotional responses to the novel in a more nuanced way than has been possible thus far.

Radcliffe's Permeations

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Radcliffe tells the story of Emily St. Aubert, a sensitive young woman who loses her mother and later her father. Under the guardianship of her aunt Madame Montoni (née Cheron), she falls into the hands of her aunt's villainous new husband, Montoni, who conveys Emily from France to Italy and holds her at his castle,

Udolpho, in order to gain her inheritance. Throughout the novel, Emily attempts to follow the advice of her father, St. Aubert, and curb her sensibility, even as she tries to unravel mysteries that expose her to gruesome sights and bizarre happenings. In descriptions of Emily, her environment, and other characters, sweetness recurs in significant ways.

Although the richest subject of analysis for the purposes of this chapter is the way sweetness interacts with atmosphere, emotions, and characters in *Udolpho*, it is worth briefly examining the novel's portrayal of sweetness in foods, as it might affect readers. Food appears several times in the novel, as Emily travels with her father, receiving hospitality from rustic people; as she is shuffled around after her father's death by her sinister guardians, who feast on delicacies; and as she is presented with sustenance by a servant at Udolpho. Though Emily's grief over the deaths of her parents, her torment over her relationship with Valancourt, and her terror while being held in the seemingly haunted castle often cause the heroine to lose her appetite, Radcliffe uses food to convey character. Most often, these foods are sweet: cherries, figs, grapes, fruits and ices, fruit and cream. Though cheese and ham also appear, and characters drink wine and (anachronistically) coffee, the people of *Udolpho* subsist on sweets. These sweets, though occasionally fashionable foods consumed by Emily's guardians among decadent Venetians, are more often pastoral—simple meals offered to Emily and her father by generous peasants or eaten outside by people, like St. Aubert, who prize pastoral simplicity. The fruits of *Udolpho* act as indicators of the kind of sensible taste that G. J. Barker-Benfield identifies as a refined simplicity that for Radcliffe was a marker of virtue.[22] Though Elizabeth Andrews reads

[22] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 207.

eating in *Udolpho* as a sign of monstrous feminine excess,[23] this reading overlooks the way St. Aubert (who, as many have observed, exemplifies sensibility even as he condemns it) establishes the consumption of food, especially simple, sweet food, as a tasteful act that is a necessary part of idealized class relations. Sweet foods often act as a site of commonality between the St. Auberts, with their moderate status and means, and those with low social rank, linking sweetness and socioeconomic status.

The ways Radcliffe writes of sweetness beyond food are various and interrelated, and considering them in detail could enable a fuller understanding of the emotional responses of her audience. The essence of sweetness in the novel is pleasure, though that pleasure is complex. Etymologically and conceptually, sweetness has always been understood in terms of pleasure. Radcliffe offers *sweet* as a synonym for *pleasant* early in the novel, via an interpellated poem that parallels the two words through the opening of successive stanzas: "How pleasant . . . " and "But sweeter, sweeter still."[24] When the word appears without other contextual markers, it simply indicates that something is satisfying. However, the word's contextual complexities often convey a richness that denotation cannot. Sweetness for Radcliffe is first and foremost an emotional concept. As an element that indicates pleasurable sensations and emotions, it modifies numerous feelings and expressions of feeling. After St. Aubert's death, "a thousand sweet emotions" accompany Emily's tender sorrow.[25] While this is obviously an exaggeration, it is true that Radcliffe describes an impressive range of emotions as being tinged with this flavor: melancholy,

[23] Elizabeth Andrews, "Devouring the Gothic: Food and the Gothic Body" (PhD diss., University of Stirling, 2008), https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/bitstream/1893/375/1/Devouring%20the%20Gothic%20Food%20and%20the%20Gothic%20Body.pdf.

[24] Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16.
[25] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 85.

affection, gratitude, calm, pathos, kindness, hope, delight, thrills of fear, tenderness, revenge. It most often modifies melancholy but remains distinct from it, as Radcliffe makes clear when she describes a lover's tears as "sweet, yet melancholy."[26] Radcliffe's mixed feelings are not usually the bittersweet, amalgamated ones of other imaginative writers, nor are they the alternating or vying ones described by Hume; in *Udolpho*, pleasure remains a discrete flavor that coats many emotions, making them more palatable.

Just as pleasant flavors open the palate, Radcliffe's sweet emotions imply receptivity to the world. Receptivity, in the many forms it takes in the novel, composes an important aspect of the emotional "flavor" of Radcliffe's sweetness. Radcliffe establishes a connection between sweetness and receptivity early in the novel when she writes that St. Aubert, after offering money and kindness to the elderly people he supports, "experienced the sweet calm . . . which disposes [the mind] to receive pleasure from every surrounding object."[27] While calm may often be the absence of agitation, *sweet* calm is a particular kind of pleasant calm. Sweet calm makes a person more open to the environment and invites further pleasure to flow from the world to the person. In the same way that St. Aubert's consumption of literal sweets connects him to an idealized pastoral mode of harmony with nature, his taste for sweet emotions allows him to take in features of the world around him. Adela Pinch, in *Strange Fits of Passion*, suggests that in *Udolpho* emotion spreads from one person to another through weeping onto another's hands, and I would argue that sweetness is another mode of "emotional transmission" in the novel.[28]

[26] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 295.
[27] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 15.
[28] Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 128.

Radcliffe underscores the emotional openness that sweetness entails by connecting it to music—a sensory fusion of taste and sound that highlights the border-crossing tendencies of sweetness as an emotional concept. While scholars have generally focused on the sense of sight in Radcliffe's work, some have considered the importance of sound, among them Frits Noske, who notes that Radcliffe's music plays a necessary role in linking characters, such as when lovers encounter each other for the first time, and that the music of these encounters is suffused with sadness.[29] The essential role of music in social and emotional communication is one that Noske gestures at. While music certainly conveys essential information at first meeting, it continues to function as a method of emotional persuasion beyond first encounters. While these emotional encounters often involve melancholy, Radcliffe describes music as sweet consistently. Radcliffe's sound enters and affects people like food, though these people usually have no choice in what they consume. Radcliffe's music often produces feeling in its hearers automatically, as if they have no mediating structures between the intended emotion and a corresponding response. In a notable scene in which a character resists this effect, Vivaldi in *The Italian* attempts to escape a church where religious music provokes painful feeling in him, showing how bodily removal beyond the range of hearing is the sole recourse against the invasive emotional operations of music.[30] Radcliffe's strong association of music and sweetness thus suggests that sweetness involves emotional permeability, which will be essential in understanding it as an emotional "flavor" of *Udolpho* that could influence the changes in emotional taste that I consider in this chapter.

[29] Frits Noske, "Sound and Sentiment: The Function of Music in the Gothic Novel," *Music and Letters* 62.2 (1981): 166, http://www.jstor.org/stable/735031.
[30] Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian,* ed. Frederick Garber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 117.

In *Udolpho*, sweetness, often in the form of music, is frequently the tool that enables elements outside the self to have an internal, emotional effect, and it is thus part of the emotional dynamics that compose the novel. Noelle Louise Chao draws attention to the way that sound (natural and musical) leads to emotional response in Radcliffe,[31] but going beyond this observation to consider the specifics of this process reveals the penetrative nature of sweetness. For example, when the heroine, Emily, suffers with the knowledge of her lover's vices, it is overheard music, not the consciousness of the situation, that ultimately pushes her to tears: "While she yet paced the room, the still, soft note of an oboe, or flute, was heard mingling with the blast, the sweetness of which affected Emily's spirits; she paused a moment in attention; the tender tones, as they swelled along the wind, till they were lost again in the ruder gust, came with a plaintiveness, that touched her heart, and she melted into tears."[32] The music, as is common in the novel, interacts with nature, as the wind obscures, conveys, and unites with the notes, delivering their pleasurable and painful emotions inextricably from the natural world. These sweet emotions do not travel through her ears and mind but rather reach her heart directly and cause an immediate dissolution. Of course, these effects occur when a character's circumstances predispose an emotional reaction, but it is sweetness, bearing emotion drawn from and in concert with the outside world, that catalyzes the response. This sweet emotional receptivity in the novel models a much simpler form of affectivity than the one I am investigating in this chapter, one in which an emotional flavor (sweetness) delivers an appropriate feeling from the world straight into a person. Real-life responses to the novel are much more

[31] Noelle Louise Chao, "Musical Letters: Eighteenth-Century Writings on Music and the Fictions of Burney, Radcliffe, and Scott," (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2007), 211.
[32] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 623.

complicated, as the rage of some readers suggests, and the gendering of Radcliffe's sweetness helps account for that complication.

The gendering of *Udolpho*'s sweet interactivity, when explored thoroughly, can provide a clue as to why the novel became distasteful to many readers. Sweetness in Radcliffe, as in a long cultural tradition, is a feminine attribute. Regardless of the potential complication of gendering presented by the fact that St. Aubert adores sweet foods or the fact that scholars have described Radcliffe's heroes as feminized, men in *Udolpho* are never "sweet," and women are either conspicuously sweet or conspicuously lacking in sweetness. As a decidedly feminized quality, sweetness is sometimes a general quality of *Udolpho*'s female characters, especially Emily and her aunt, the deceased Marchioness. When Emily examines a miniature of the woman who turns out to be the Marchioness, she observes that her face "was characterized by an expression of sweetness, shaded with sorrow, and tempered by resignation."[33] The fact that sorrow and resignation here act upon a base of sweetness illustrates how sweetness as a personal attribute of women functions differently from sweetness as an attribute of feelings or sounds. Earlier I discussed how sweetness can be a secondary feature, part of a pleasant delivery system for feelings like sadness. Here, though, the woman's sweet appearance undergirds the feelings her face expresses. It is her essential feature, which could imply that sweet women are themselves like delivery systems, their primary function being to convey feeling in a palatable manner.

Considering the women in *Udolpho* who lack sweetness helps clarify how this quality defines women as conductors of agreeable emotion by demonstrating the unpleasant alternative for women in the novel. Radcliffe contrasts Emily's aunt Madame

[33] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 104.

Montoni with Emily in many respects, opposing the older woman's "haughty sullenness of her countenance and manner, and the ostentatious extravagance of her dress" to Emily's "beauty, modesty, sweetness and simplicity."[34] Sweetness here contrasts with sullenness, which, while denoting ill humor, derives from *sol* or *sole*, meaning single in the sense of unmarried. Though Madame Montoni does marry, it is as part of Montoni's scheming, and when he finds her intractable, he does away with her by isolation and neglect. Madame Montoni embodies the opposite of feminine sweetness with her independence and unpleasant unwillingness to attend to the needs and feelings of others, thereby making it clear that an aspect of Radcliffe's sweetness is pleasant, ingratiating interactivity.

The Countess, a minor character who is also an antagonistic woman, contrasts accommodating femininity with her impassivity and dominance. Radcliffe writes that "her manners had little of the tempered sweetness, which is necessary to render the female character interesting, but she could occasionally throw them into an affectation of spirits, which seemed to triumph over every person, who approached her."[35] What the Countess lacks in affect, she substitutes with affectation, artificially shaping her manners and denying access to her interiority. Rather than maintaining a calculating composure, though, she aggressively "throw[s]" her behavior in a way that overmasters anyone who attempts to enter her space. This defensive, aggressive way of being suggests its opposite, sweetness, as a state of invitation, and indeed, the narrator claims that this state is requisite for a woman who wants to involve, much less captivate anyone.

The distinction between a woman who captivates (a positive model in Radcliffe's world, as a feature of the virtuous Emily and the martyred Marchioness) and a woman who

[34] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 183.
[35] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 500.

triumphs is exemplified by the murderous Signora Laurentini. Emily encounters her portrait as well, but unlike the portrait of the Marchioness, Laurentini's face "had little of the captivating sweetness, that Emily had looked for, and still less of the pensive mildness she loved" but was rather "handsome and noble, full of strong expression" with "a haughty impatience of misfortune—not the placid melancholy of a spirit injured, yet resigned."[36] The comparison with Emily's aunt the Marchioness, or even with Emily herself, shows Laurentini to be attractive, though in a masculine way, conveying masculine honor, power, and force rather than feminine virtue, weakness, and acceptance. Though Laurentini triumphs over her romantic rival, the gentle, feminine, long-suffering, captivating Marchioness, it is through killing her, which earns Laurentini a lifetime of torment.

By examining *Udolpho*'s female characters who lack sweetness, we can see that feminine sweetness in the novel is the opposite of unpleasantness, independence, artificiality, aggression, and force. Feminine sweetness emerges as a quality that reveals itself in interactivity—the ability or willingness to affect and be affected, particularly in a gently insinuative or passive manner. Related to the pleasantness and receptivity of sweetness as a quality of emotions, feminine sweetness of manner, is, in part, the state of being responsive to a man's will. This may take the form of a filial obedience, such as when Emily enjoys the "sweet emulation of practicing precepts, which her father had so frequently inculcated."[37] Virtuous pliability characterizes the behavior of a dutiful daughter, but feminine pliability extends to other roles as well.

In romantic situations, *Udolpho*'s sweetness is a quality associated with passively inviting a man's desire, sometimes as a shy but intentional invitation from a woman, and

[36] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 278.
[37] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 119.

sometimes despite a woman's attempts to fend off a man's unwanted advances. When Valancourt finds himself fascinated by Emily and seeks a sign of her regard before they part, she provides this sign by "bow[ing] to him with a countenance full of timid sweetness."[38] Though demonstrating modesty and reticence, she communicates her receptivity to his courtship. However, this attitude of receptivity appears to be a feature of virtuous feminine sweetness even when a woman does not wish to reciprocate interest. When Montoni's vicious associate Cavigni first reveals his attraction to Emily, she shies away from his signs of affection, speaking infrequently in their conversation, but even so, "the gentleness and sweetness of her manners encouraged him" to continue his amorous addresses.[39] Cavigni, whose attention here is unwanted, receives reinforcement of his desire from Emily's pleasant feminine openness, which prohibits her from doing anything but being somewhat less responsive than usual and passively awaiting the withdrawal of his notice.[40]

The fact that Emily's sweetness invites unwanted attention signals that though this feminine attribute often accompanies virtuous characters and situations, it does not preclude vice. Signora Livona, a woman characterized by the kind of "sweetness" that persuades Emily of her good nature,[41] turns out to be Montoni's mistress, one of a group of women who cavort licentiously in the castle of Udolpho while Emily remains a prisoner there.[42] Livona's agreeable accessibility makes her a fallen woman, while the same quality

[38] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 36.
[39] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 122.
[40] This is the first of multiple implied sexual threats to Emily in the novel, such as the mysterious late-night invasions of her bedroom at Udolpho and Cavigni's counterpart Verezzi's drunken, lascivious search for her there. Emily's ineffectual response to these threats inspires more apprehension (for me at least) than the supernatural atmosphere in the novel.
[41] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 183.
[42] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 392.

in Emily and the Marchioness composes part of their feminine virtue. Because a sweet woman's role is to gently, pleasantly affect men, her sweetness may take the form of unintentional sexual invitation, as it does for Emily with Cavigni, but it may also befit a mistress like Livona, or even a prostitute, suggesting that it could be wielded as a form of influence, though one without a clearly virtuous nature.

When used virtuously, the novel's feminine pleasing is primarily passive, but it also allows a form of power. The interactivity of feminine sweetness, in addition to involving openness to men, also involves what Radcliffe refers to as a captivating quality, which consists of a method of insinuating emotion into a person. Chao argues that with her musical women, Radcliffe privileges the act of listening rather than the act of performing, highlighting their embodied receptivity as a model of feminine sensibility that features responsiveness rather than masculine self-absorption.[43] While *Udolpho*'s sweet women are certainly not self-absorbed, they do use sweetness, in the form of playing music and other acts, in order to gently manipulate others. Early in the novel, when St. Aubert descends into melancholy reflection, Emily reacts instantly. Radcliffe writes that St. Aubert "sunk into a thoughtfulness, which Emily observing, she immediately began to sing one of those simple and lively airs he was so fond of, and which she knew how to give with the most captivating sweetness."[44] Emily displays the responsiveness of feminine sweetness by noticing and reacting quickly and generously, a process so seamless that Radcliffe integrates it all into the same sentence. Yet Emily also attempts to alter her father's mood in a "captivating" manner that suggests a feminine power of attraction that entices people into bondage rather than overpowering them.

[43] Chao, "Musical Letters," 225, 229.
[44] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 51.

This form of emotional suasion combines submissive accommodation and tolerance with influence that attempts to correct a person's wayward emotions, but to do so in a pleasing manner. The late Marchioness, by her servant's report, exemplified this complex feminine sweetness when trying to manage her cruel husband: "My lady always tried to conceal her tears from the Marquis, for I have often seen her, after she has been so sorrowful, look so calm and sweet, when he came into the room!" And when he was harsh to her, "she never complained, and she used to try so sweetly to oblige him and to bring him into a good humour, that my heart has often ached to see it."[45] Interestingly, the Marchioness practices emotional deception like the Countess, but rather than using it to overpower others, she uses it to diminish herself. She epitomizes Radcliffe's feminine sweetness, passively remaining open to her husband's emotional atmosphere, absorbing his negativity and allowing it to affect her. Yet as her goal is her husband's pleasure, she orients herself to his emotions, without revealing her resulting suffering to him. She attempts an active emotional role, transporting him toward a state of happiness, seemingly selflessly, with the goal of gratifying him and returning him to emotional health. Without casting doubt on the virtue of the Marchioness's sweetness, Radcliffe shows it allows behavior that can lead to murder.

These examples illustrate some of the ways in which *Udolpho*'s sweetness saturates the novel. It is an element that defines ideals for emotional engagement with the environment and other people, especially ideals for feminine emotional engagement, sometimes in ways a modern reader could find unsavory. As a coating for painful emotions, it adds a satisfying element to the work's darkness, but when applied to the emotional

[45] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 524.

practices of its female characters, this gratifying quality becomes associated with acting as a receptacle for lust and cruelty. In contrast to the bitter, worldly viciousness of some of the novel's characters, sweetness shows a positive closeness to nature, an idyllic, pastoral, sentimental simplicity that offers an alternative to isolation and self-interest. Yet this sweetness, while allowing a form of influence, remains a quality that compels women to placate vicious people and eat their bitterness until it poisons them. *Udolpho*'s sweetness, for women, at best enables them to please men in a way that modern readers may find diminishing or manipulative, and at worst attracts rapists and murderers. The only other option the novel allows for women who engage with men is a sullen detachment or fierce dominance that Radcliffe portrays as repulsive.

Tainted Sweetness

Though the advances of feminism allow us to see how *Udolpho*'s feminine sweetness is not as positive as Radcliffe may have intended it to appear, she was building on a discourse that allied sweetness with virtue unequivocally. Her admiration of John Milton, revealed in her epigraphs, likely influenced her portrayal of sweetness as a state of virtuous receptivity. Denise Gigante, while making a case for Milton as the originator of an eighteenth-century British idea of taste as the attempt to consume beauty and evacuate artistic impurities, describes Milton's Satan in terms of deceptive, immoral sweetness, linking his "subtlety" to the contemporary word for excessive aristocratic desserts.[46] However, Milton's use of the actual word *sweet*, which appears sixty-eight times in *Paradise Lost* and only seven in

[46] Gigante, *Taste*, 42.

Paradise Regained despite Satan's presence, describes prelapsarian perfection. Nature, music, and innocence are sweet, and Eve's "sweet compliance" is praiseworthy, much like the submissive sweetness Radcliffe describes.[47] Because Milton's writing was frequently cited in the eighteenth century as the height of good taste, the way Radcliffe draws on his virtuous sweetness could help explain her positive reception in her own era.

Yet also at the time of *Udolpho*'s publication, a more negative discourse on sweetness, one with similarities to the attributes of Milton's Satan, was gaining purchase. Now that I have explored the novel's sweet emotional dynamics, I will consider how the values implicit in these dynamics conflict with other values at stake in the contemporary conversation about femininity, emotion, and sweetness. Mary Wollstonecraft's foundational feminist text, *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (published two years before *Udolpho*), makes an argument about patriarchy that could have affected the reception of *Udolpho*. Wollstonecraft characterizes sensibility and delicate taste as cultivated vulnerability that keeps women from achieving autonomy and influence,[48] and she describes the language associated with this feminized culture as sweet:

> These pretty superlatives, dropping glibly from the tongue, vitiate the taste, and create a kind of sickly delicacy that turns away from simple unadorned truth; and a deluge of false sentiments and overstretched feelings, stifling the natural emotions of the heart, render the domestic pleasures insipid, that ought to sweeten the exercise of those severe duties, which educate a rational and immortal being for a nobler field of action.[49]

Wollstonecraft's phrasing suggests that the cultivation of the "sickly delicacy" that attends the culture of sensibility dulls natural emotions and the capacity for public virtue in the

[47] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* [1667], The John Milton Reading Room, 8.603, https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/pl/book_8/text.shtml.
[48] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Pearson, 2007), 25.
[49] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 26.

same way that habituating oneself to sugary confections makes fruit taste bland. This comparison suggests how feminine sweetness could become associated with emotional insincerity of the kind critics begin to identify and object to in Radcliffe over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally, it implies that sweet women participate in a system of values that prevents them and others from achieving their potential, illuminating why feminists could experience anger at Emily for being sweet in a way that not only hurts herself but also upholds a structure of patriarchal power.

Wollstonecraft and others also participate in the late-eighteenth-century British anti-slavery discourse, the lingering effects of which could compound a negative association with Radcliffe's sweetness. In her article "Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792," Charlotte Sussman writes that at around this time anti-slavery activists began to campaign against the use of slave-produced sugar, which had become a regular part of the British diet.[50] This campaign centered on women, calling upon them to act as moral exemplars by abstaining from sugar in sympathy with the horrors experienced by enslaved people, while also criticizing their complicity in slavery through their domestic choices. Sussman analyzes a passage in which Wollstonecraft draws on this campaign against sugar to compare the enforcement of women's propriety, of which submissive sweetness is a part, to the enslavement of Africans for sugar production. Sussman writes that according to Wollstonecraft,

> Femininity based simply on propriety "sweetens" the male experience of domestic space in the same poisonous way that the labor of African slaves sweetens the consumer's cup of tea. Wollstonecraft links the oppression of women by a male desire for the metaphorical "sweetness" of femininity with the oppression of Africans by the consumer's desire for the literal sweetness

[50] Charlotte Sussman, "Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792," *Representations* 48 (Autumn 1994), 48-69, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928610.

> of sugar. The connection implies that a feminine virtue based on reason rather than propriety would rid the home of both forms of pollution, false sweetness and colonial produce.[51]

Even if we were to read this analysis as an overstatement of Wollstonecraft's engagement with issues in the Caribbean based on her rhetorical usage of slavery, as some scholars might,[52] Sussman's attention to Wollstonecraft's concern about the broader corrupting effects of false, feminine sweetness is helpful in indicating the stakes of sweetness at the time.

There is also some evidence to connect one of Radcliffe's reviewers to the discourse on slavery. Coleridge, who may be the reviewer who complained in 1794 about the way *Udolpho* stimulates curiosity to a degree that cannot be sated as if the novel were a non-nutritive food, writes one year later against the consumption of sugar, another overstimulating product. Illustrating the hypocrisy of sensibility, he describes a tea-drinking, novel-reading woman's unresponsiveness to the horrifying conditions of the slave trade: "[T]he fine lady's nerves are not shattered by the shrieks! She sips a beverage sweetened with human blood, even while she is weeping over the refined sorrows of Werter [sic] or of Clementina. Sensibility is not Benevolence."[53] The scene Coleridge paints here exemplifies a popular concern from earlier in the eighteenth century, that the cultivation and performance of fine feeling through reading novels of sensibility and weeping over them did not reflect altruism but was in fact a distraction from real suffering. The scrutiny of women's virtue in the realms of feeling and consumption are joined in this

[51] Sussman, "Women and the Politics of Sugar," 60.
[52] On Wollstonecraft's rhetoric of slavery, see, for example, Carol Howard, "Wollstonecraft's Thoughts on Slavery and Corruption," *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 61-86, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41467935.
[53] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 2, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Routledge, 1995), 139, qtd. in Sussman, "Women and the Politics of Sugar," 59.

critique of the use of sugar, which may have had an impact on the association of women, sweetness, and revolting behavior, an association that, in turn, could have had an impact on *Udolpho*'s reception.

However, even if Radcliffe's literary reputation did suffer in part from this association, it seems somewhat unjust. In fact, Radcliffe herself may have been aware of the criticisms of sugar when she wrote *Udolpho*—her virtuous characters most often eat fruit. The ices in the novel would have been sweetened with fruit juice in time the novel is set, but even if Radcliffe were anachronistically envisioning the sugar-sweetened ices of her day, only the more vicious characters consume them.[54] This general abstention from sugar could certainly be explained by Radcliffe's fondness for the pastoral or Miltonic traditions, or by her attempts to locate the story in 1584, a historical moment that preceded the growth of the Atlantic slave trade, but the many times in the novel in which characters anachronistically act like eighteenth-century British people would allow for the drinking of sweetened tea, which never occurs. Given the fact that Radcliffe strenuously attempts to make the virtue of Emily and her aunt apparent through their sweetness, in compliance with the standards of feminine propriety of Radcliffe's day, it seems likely that she would not have neglected to attend to the politically virtuous source of that literal sweetness when women in her country were being targeted for their sugar consumption as she was writing the novel. Even so, the discourse on women, sugar, slavery, and emotion may have had lasting effects in associating sweetness with the false and oppressive implications of women's domestic pleasing and their sentimental reading, creating a lingering taint that could have affected how readers perceive Radcliffe's sweetness. According to the OED, by

[54] For culinary histories of sugar, see Andrew F. Smith, *Sugar: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015) and Jeri Quinzio, *Of Sugar and Snow: A History of Ice Cream Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

1841 *saccharine* had gained the contemptuous usage we are familiar with today, which suggests that even after the debate about sugar passed into obscurity, our language preserved some of the essence of it. That dictionary's first citation for the word's usage to describe literature comes from the *Spectator* in 1890, less than a decade before Beers mocks Radcliffe, which signals a turn in her reception from confused distaste to open contempt.

Radcliffe's Penetrations and Mediations

Thus far, in my attempt to seek a cause for the change in emotional taste that has affected the reception of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, I have argued that a central emotional feature of *Udolpho* is sweetness, a feminine receptivity, submission, and persuasion, and that this figurative sweetness as well as literal sweetness in the form of sugar were embroiled in controversy at the time of its publication, possibly with pervasive effects long after. I will now consider the question of why another one of Radcliffe's most read novels, *The Italian*, published just three years after *Udolpho*, has not suffered the same change in responses from delight to disgust. Numerous critics have praised *The Italian*, routinely ranking it above the more widely read *Udolpho* over the centuries. To test whether *Udolpho*'s emotional "flavor" of sweetness could indeed be responsible for some of its lack of appeal over time in comparison to *The Italian*, I decided to see whether *The Italian* also possesses this flavor.

As it turns out, *The Italian* is significantly less sweet that *Udolpho*. In contrast to *Udolpho*'s 131 occurrences of the word sweet, *The Italian* mentions sweetness only 28

times. Radcliffe often describes music as sweet in the later novel, as well as the heroine, Ellena di Rosalba, especially her voice. Ellena, similar to *Udolpho*'s Emily, loses her benevolent guardian and suffers transport, imprisonment, and multiple threats. She also shows some of the emotional openness that Emily and others display in *Udolpho*, as her "mind was capable of being highly elevated, or sweetly soothed, by scenes of nature."[55] Despite this occasional note of sweetness, though, Radcliffe focuses *The Italian*'s emotional interactions not on receptivity and subtle persuasion but on obstruction and intimidation, exemplified by the villain Schedoni, who became a monk after murdering his brother, Ellena's father. Describing a portrait of Schedoni in his youth, Radcliffe writes, "The miniature displayed a young man rather handsome, of a gay and smiling countenance; yet the smile expressed triumph, rather than sweetness, and his whole air and features were distinguished by a consciousness of superiority that rose even to haughtiness."[56] This portrait recalls Radcliffe's women who lack sweetness in *Udolpho*, as Schedoni face is conspicuously missing a submissive, pleasing quality and instead exhibits his tendency to dominate. The fact that Radcliffe employs a description for Schedoni that she had previously reserved for unappealing women offers some indication of his unusual status as a character. It is even possible that it is his emotional hybridity, his mixture of Radcliffe's gendered emotional types, that makes *The Italian* more lastingly appealing than *Udolpho*.

If we analyze *The Italian* through the idea of emotional taste, the culturally distinct preferences for and aversions to certain kinds of literary feelings, we can see that the emotional taste for *The Italian* has remained more or less the same over time, similar in constancy to Parsons's *Wolfenbach*, except that readers express continuously positive

[55] Radcliffe, *Italian*, 90.
[56] Radcliffe, *Italian*, 238.

attitudes instead of continuously negative ones. By selectively focusing on these positive responses to *The Italian*, I have observed that often, those who express the most satisfaction with the novel's emotional qualities do so because of the villain Schedoni, whom many regard as Radcliffe's most emotionally complex character. In 1798 the British Critic writes that Schedoni is "drawn with much ability" with a "subtle" mind.[57] In a 1911 essay on Radcliffe, teacher Lucy Harrison calls Schedoni her "masterpiece,"[58] as does scholar Edith Birkhead in 1921.[59] More recent amateur reviews lack the animosity that they online critics showed for *Udolpho*, and many express appreciation for Schedoni as well: "[I]n the end you even feel sorry of the villians [sic] because they too realize (however late) that what they did was wrong," writes one reviewer,[60] and "Schedoni steals the show, as all great villains do," writes another.[61] Even critics who are not in the habit of expressing enthusiasm offer measured praise for the emotional dynamics of the novel and its central villain: In 1899, a time in which critics were generally scornful of Radcliffe, Wilbur Cross's *Development of the English Novel* grants that "[i]n 'The Italian,' Mrs. Radcliffe drew upon less artificial sources of fear," including monks,[62] and in her 1998 introduction to the novel, E. J. Clery describes Schedoni as having "some psychological complexity."[63] All of these responses suggest that in order to find a reason for what appears to be the continuing

[57] Review of *The Italian*, by Ann Radcliffe, the *British Critic: And Quarterly Theological Review* 10 (April 1829): 266, Google Books.
[58] Lucy Harrison, "Ann Radcliffe—Novelist [1911]," *A Lover of Books: The Life and Literary Papers of Lucy Harrison*, ed. Amy Greener (New York: Dutton, 1916), 198, qtd. in Rogers, *Bio-Bibliography*, 84.
[59] Edith Birkhead, "'The Novel of Suspense.' Mrs. Radcliffe," *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance* (London: Constable, 1921), qtd. in Rogers, *Bio-Bibliography*, 85.
[60] A Customer, review of *The Italian*, by Ann Radcliffe, Amazon.com, July 22, 1998, https://www.amazon.com/review/R2WW2SX9ILO86K.
[61] Johnny Waco, review of *The Italian*, by Ann Radcliffe, Goodreads.com, December 16, 2008, http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/40249755?book_show_action=true.
[62] Wilbur L. Cross, *The Development of the English Novel* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1903 [1899]): 105.
[63] E. J. Clery, introduction to *The Italian,* by Ann Radcliffe, ed. Frederick Garber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxii.

emotional tastefulness of *The Italian*, in contrast to the growing disgust for *Udolpho*, it is necessary to begin by looking more closely at the emotional portrayal of Schedoni.

Whereas the word *sweet* is essential to many of the emotional situations in *Udolpho*, in *The Italian*, cloth (in the form of veils, cowls, robes, and metaphorical wrappings) is involved in many emotional interactions, especially those with Schedoni, and closely reading the emotional function of cloth in the novel may clarify the difference in reception of the two novels. In her first description of Schedoni's appearance, Radcliffe writes that "[h]is cowl . . . as it threw a shade over the livid paleness of his face, encreased its severe character, and gave an effect to his large melancholy eye, which approached to horror."[64] It is his cowl, the covering cloth, which combines with his sad eyes to incite fear in others, and Radcliffe elaborates on the cause for this fear as the fact that his eyes are "so piercing that they seemed to penetrate, at a single glance, into the hearts of men."[65] Schedoni's cloth allows him to intimidate others. This presents a contrast to *Udolpho*'s sweetness, which also enables emotional exchanges. Whereas sweetness gently insinuates feelings into others in a feminine way, Schedoni's cloth-assisted intimidation pierces their hearts, which is also emotional penetration but a more violent, masculine one. Before he acquired his monk cowl, Schedoni's dominance was like that of *Udolpho*'s cruel women, but at this point his violent actions and his cowl help him to project a more intense and masculinized fearsomeness. Coverings, in particular veils, have been a subject of fascination for scholars writing about *The Italian* for decades, and Corinna Wagner extends this consideration to other concealments as well. Wagner reads Schedoni's coverings, and the coverings of the agents of the Inquisition in the novel, as powerful because of the manner in which they

[64] Radcliffe, *Italian*, 35.
[65] Radcliffe, *Italian*, 35.

conceal identity, creating uncertainty and misinformation and feeding irrationality rather than simply blocking the flow of truth in the way that Elizabeth Broadwell's earlier study of veils describes.[66] Yet coverings in the novel are not only tools of concealment or misinformation—they are fundamentally emotional, as they produce feeling or, as I will examine next, muffle it.[67]

When Schedoni is not acting terrifyingly, he is often closing himself off from others, a habit that Radcliffe describes in terms of metaphorical cloth. Unlike the open characters of *Udolpho*, who are receptive to their surroundings, Schedoni sometimes uses this metaphorical cloth to shut out his surroundings entirely, as when he is forced to be around others and "seemed unconscious where he was, and continued shrouded in meditation and silence till he was again alone."[68] This shroud at times removes him from the interactive world. Cloth, literal and metaphorical, proves central to Schedoni's emotional relations and functions in a way today's readers would probably find familiar. In contrast to the affective openness of sweetness, which would be strange and even repulsive to many readers now, *The Italian*'s cloth affects or disaffects while always preserving an emotional boundary for its wearer, an emotional dynamic more in keeping with the modern value of independence.

Because Radcliffe's now emotionally unappealing sweetness overflows from certain female characters and her still emotionally tasteful cloth adorns a male character, it might

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[66] Corinna Wagner, "The Dream of a Transparent Body: Identity, Science and the Gothic Novel," *Gothic Studies* 14, no. 1 (2012): 74-92, https://doi.org/10.7227/GS.14.1.8; Elizabeth P. Broadwell, "The Veil Image in Ann Radcliffe's 'The Italian,'" *South Atlantic Bulletin* 40, no. 4 (1975): 76-87, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3199122. See also Maggie Kilgour on the nature of the veil, particularly its misleading role in *Udolpho*'s revelations. Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 128-131.

[67] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick analyzes gothic veils as producers of one kind of feeling in particular—sexual desire. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel," *PMLA* 96, no. 2 (1981): 256, doi: 10.2307/461992. Ahmet Süner argues that in *The Monk*, the veil actually works as a mediating structure, both producing and inhibiting sexual desire. Ahmet Süner, "The Unveiling Gaze and the Superstition of Sexuality in *The Monk*," *Journal of Yaşar University* 8 (2013): 65, Academic Search Complete.

[68] Radcliffe, *Italian*, 34.

seem that the different genders of the characters that garner the most responses are the reason for the notable difference in the statuses of the novels. Kate Ferguson Ellis argues something like this, writing in *The Contested Castle* that "*The Mysteries of Udolpho* is the most female-centered of Radcliffe's novels," for the reasons that the plot revolves around women, while *The Italian* is less focused on women in its inheritance plot; that it is more masculine as a response to *The Monk*; and that "its center of developing consciousness is not the heroine but the villain."[69] Rogers, commenting on Ellis's assessment, writes, "It is interesting in this respect that such a novel [*The Italian*] should often be regarded as Radcliffe's best work. Perhaps Radcliffe invested herself too much in her women characters and needed a male-centered novel to explore fully the dark side of the unconscious. The character of the villain may have provided her with the intellectual and emotional distance she was unable to attain with her female characters."[70] What these judgments that rely on binary gender miss is that Schedoni is not entirely dissimilar from Ellena, the heroine of *The Italian*. Considering the emotional function of cloth in the novel reveals a parallel between the villain and the heroine, because although the somewhat sweet Ellena does not use cloth to intimidate, terrify, or pierce, she does use it as an emotional barrier, similar to Schedoni. Yael Shapira has explored the protective function of Radcliffe's literal cloth in relation to the exposed female body,[71] but attending to the role of cloth in protecting against an exposure to emotion reveals a commonality between Schedoni and Ellena that

[69] Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 121, 124.
[70] Rogers, *Bio-Bibliography*, 11.
[71] Yael Shapira, "Where the Bodies Are Hidden: Ann Radcliffe's 'Delicate' Gothic," *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 18, no. 4 (2006): 453-476, DOI: 10.1353/ecf.2006.0068.

may have helped make *The Italian* more emotionally appealing to modern audiences than *Udolpho*.

The shroud that protects Schedoni from interactivity is similar to the wrapping that Ellena makes emotional use of in the novel, which directly contrasts with the emotional function of sweetness. In *Udolpho*, sweet Emily is sometimes "wrapt" when she is immersed in the feeling of her surroundings, as when Radcliffe writes that Emily loves to walk along the mountains that inspire thoughts of God in her and "[i]n scenes like these she would often linger alone, wrapt in a melancholy charm."[72] Though Emily here is solitary, her wrapping is an immersion in the environment and its feelings, while in *The Italian* to be "wrapt" is to have something interpose between a person and the surrounding world. Like Schedoni, Ellena's emotional barrier takes the form of cloth in the novel, sometimes appearing as a wrapping of feeling that diminishes her susceptibility to the outside world. When she observes a stunning natural scene as henchmen transport her to what she assumes will be her death, she is unable to respond with her usual sensibility and be uplifted by the grandeur because her "spirit was wrapt in care."[73] Like a cloak, her preoccupation with her powerless state covers her, and she feels that wrapping of suffering rather than sweetly absorbing the feelings of nature. The emotional cloth of *The Italian* allows for a midpoint between complete susceptibility and a complete lack thereof, and it sometimes even allows for a more selective sensibility than Radcliffe's heroines often experience. For instance, when henchmen later bring Ellena to the house of the Spalatro, whom she rightly assumes has been hired to murder her, her own covering of despair still allows her to feel the pull of compassion. His "visage was so misery-struck, that Ellena

[72] Radcliffe, *Udolpho*, 6.
[73] Radcliffe, *Italian*, 64.

could not look upon it with indifference, though wrapt in misery of her own."[74] The cloak of her own feeling that muffles the feelings of the world around Ellena still allows her experience the emotions that define her as a compassionate person. In this way, while Ellena retains some of the sweet, feminine sensibility Radcliffe provides her heroines, she also possesses some of the more masculine emotional protectiveness that may be part of what makes Schedoni an appealing character. Indeed, one of the earliest reviews of *The Italian* remarks on Ellena as a hybrid character, praising her as "an excellent composition of female delicacy and innocence, with a manly dignity and firmness."[75] While today's readers probably would not use these terms, they may still appreciate the affective dynamic Radcliffe explores through Schedoni and Ellena, one in which an emotional barrier can empower a person or shut out the world but still selectively allow that person to be affected.

Conversely, *Udolpho*'s Emily shows little ability to control the degree to which she is affected by her circumstances, and her affectivity has broad implications. While, as Rogers notes, *Udolpho* has been taken up by feminist critics and analyzed in terms of domestic oppression or the subtle power of Emily, more recently Ellen Malenas Ledoux returns our attention to the way Emily's "speeches only pay lip service to courage" while her fear repeatedly overcomes her physically.[76] Feminist scholarship has advanced to a point where it is more possible to critique female authors and their works without fear of diminishing their literary standing. Meanwhile, some reviewers on Amazon and Goodreads may lack the context to appreciate the empowerment that feminist scholars once saw in Radcliffe's

[74] Radcliffe, *Italian*, 210.
[75] Review of *The Italian*, by Ann Radcliffe, the *Monthly Mirror* 3 (1797): 157, Google Books.
[76] Ellen Malenas Ledoux, *Social Reform in Gothic Writing: Fantastic Forms of Change, 1764-1834* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 73.

work, and may see only the ways Emily's emotional susceptibility abets her victimization by villains, her subordination to men in general, and her complicity in an oppressive system. Thus, to many of today's readers who have an investment in portrayals of women, Emily's emotional expressions are not merely unnatural, as they seemed around the turn of the last century, nor are they laughable, as they may have been to male critics in the mid-1900s. A mild distaste shows that emotional conventions, and the values that accompany them, have changed. Amusement suggests distance, like those who were able to read Parsons's *Castle of Wolfenbach* as mere genre and find a remedy for boredom in counting tears. *Udolpho*, however, remains personal to many, and the implications of Radcliffe's exaltation of Emily's sweet susceptibility suggests why. Women in America today still receive messages about being pleasing, receptive, and tender, even as they receive simultaneous messages about being powerful and protecting themselves. Schedoni and Ellena, to different extents, combine emotional vulnerability with imperviousness in a way that harmonizes somewhat with today's ideals for women, and Schedoni also exemplifies the kind of self-command and intimidation of others that corporate America values, and though it still comes with a stigma for women, it is to a lesser extent than the stigma Radcliffe draws on in her portrayals of women who are insufficiently sweet.

Uses of Emotional Taste

These different models of emotional dynamics need to be considered separately from other literary phenomena in order to understand why emotional responses can change over time. Emotional dynamics, because they involve interaction, easily encompass cultural values

and easily change over time. Emotional taste, as a method of reception studies, focuses specifically on the way emotional responses to literature across time and culture can point us to the conversations about cultural values that particular literary works prompt. A narrow focus on emotion makes changes across time more easily trackable, and it also increases the chances that culturally contentious issues in the work will become clearer, as emotional responses that conflict could direct us to the source of that divergence. In contrast to the heritage of aesthetic taste in general, emotional taste does not presume that there is a correct response to works of art, or that only pleasure and displeasure are relevant responses, because its aim is to understand difference in all its richness.

Though I believe that tracking changes in emotional taste through reviews can provide scholars with a method for understanding literary reception across eras without sacrificing historical specificity, this method has no claims to objectivity, in contrast to the popular ways of assessing reader response or historical change in literature that increasingly use scientific and computational methods. In exploring the emotional dimensions of *Udolpho* and *The Italian*, I have made interpretive choices that not all scholars would make when analyzing the reviews and the novels. For instance, centuries of writing on emotion have not produced a definition that perfectly distinguishes feelings from judgments, and the way I have read the tone of reviews is certainly subjective. Further, the trends I noticed when reading reviews may not have appeared to other scholars working with the same material, may not have appeared significant, or may not have prompted the same kind of literary analysis I have performed in this chapter. It would be much neater if I were able to suggest that every literary work has an emotional flavor that should be evident to all careful readers and should map onto all responses to a work.

Even if that is in fact the case, what appears as an emotional flavor to me will not appear the same way to every scholar. Sweetness, as an actual flavor, may be more convincingly called an emotional flavor, but cloth, though I believe it encapsulates emotional dynamics in the same way sweetness does, will be less persuasively called an emotional flavor. Even so, the interpretive decisions I have made in this chapter have enabled a way to see the kind of fine-grained affective differences that Ben Highmore called for when he pointed out that the existing discourse on taste does not allow us to understand why people favor one Coltrane album over another. Viewed through the lens of emotional taste, *Udolpho* has a prominent quality that distinguishes it from its close kin, *The Italian*, and justifies the different kinds of responses the novels have received.

Sweetness and cloth, as metaphors, do emotional work that may be apparent in any literary texts that employ metaphors and narratively complex emotional situations. Laura Micciche, in her book *Doing Emotion*, unites George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's explanation of the way metaphors alter perception with Sara Ahmed's "stickiness," which describes the way some words accumulate associations historically and thereby produce affective responses like disgust that become comprehensible through those connotations. Micciche writes that the changes in perception are attributable not only to a metaphor itself, "but also to the circulation of feeling through metaphor, an adhesive that binds metaphor to bodies, objects, experiences, and perceptions. Metaphors accrue a certain amount of stickiness through repetition and circulation, shaping constructions and perceptions of reality while creating affective spaces."[77] In this way, differences in critics' responses to literary works that rely on metaphors to convey central emotional dynamics could reveal

[77] Laura R. Micciche, *Doing Emotion: Rhetoric, Writing, Teaching* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 2007), 38.

differences in ideologies, and even allow us to follow the growth and change of ways of feeling in the world.

CHAPTER 4

Jeers for Fears: Camp and Ambiguity in *The Castle of Otranto*

> Use bad writing exemplars such as the classic overdramatic sentimental Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and ask [students] to imitate such over written passages as this:
>
> > 'Oh! my Lord, my Lord!' cried she; 'we are all undone!'
> > 'What is it?' cried Manfred amazed.
> > 'Oh! the hand! the Giant! the hand!—support me! I am terrified out of my senses,' cried Bianca. 'I will not sleep in the castle to-night. Where shall I go? my things may come after me tomorrow—would I had been content to wed Francesco! this comes of ambition!'
> > 'What has terrified thee thus, young woman?' said the Marquis. 'Thou art safe here; be not alarmed.' (Walpole 1764, 125).
>
> By asking students to imitate such a passage, we can then analyse not what is 'bad' about such writing, but what conventions of the genre are in operation, how appropriate and effective are they, and whether we should emulate them. 'Good' is no longer a moral term imposed by instructors, but a contextual one.
> —Paul Williams, "Teaching Bad Writing"

The creative writing exercise above shows four ideas that will be central to this chapter: Most centrally, it makes the point that I have been illustrating throughout this dissertation, that good and bad writing are not absolute and ought not be as closely entangled with other virtues and vices as they have been and continue to be. The second and third features to note are the mechanical and emotional aspects that Williams realizes will strike most of today's students as components of bad writing. Mechanically, it will be helpful to observe that this passage contains multiple exclamations and dashes, and that Williams has chosen to separate the dialogue onto different lines, contrary to the edition he cites, which runs all the dialogue together,[1] choices that I will explore thoroughly later in the chapter. Emotionally, it represents a complicated mixture of feelings—Bianca, a servant, fears for

[1] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Joseph Thomas, 1840 [1764]), 125.

her life in the face of a supernatural threat, yet also takes a moment to logically consider the practicalities of fleeing and to rue the decisions that brought her to this point. Manfred, a nobleman, contrasts Bianca's terror with an almost unreasonable composure that highlights the extremity of Bianca's agitation. The fact that we could read a scene like this one as intended to be moving or humorous illustrates the emotional ambiguity of this novel, which I will discuss later on. The final thing I would like to point out about this passage is that despite his claim that context matters in judging writing, Williams begins this description of a writing activity by articulating that there is such a thing as a "bad writing exemplar," and Horace Walpole's "overdramatic," "over written" 1764 gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, is one of these.[2]

Strangely, *Otranto* has managed to cultivate a reputation as a work that is simultaneously exemplary in its genre and exemplary for its bad writing. In the previous chapter I explored how the reception of Ann Radcliffe's *Udolpho* changed for the worse, as over time readers express more virulent distaste for its emotional qualities. *Otranto*, in contrast, has provoked ambivalence for centuries, despite being widely studied as the first gothic novel. Peter Sabor, the foremost expert on Walpole criticism, describes Walpole's literary reputation as "characterized by indecision and paradox. Walpole both is and is not a major writer; he is at once trivial and significant, innovative and merely *avant-garde*, original and jejune."[3] Michael Gamer similarly notices that "in its immediate reception and in the many appraisals that have followed, critical responses to *The Castle of Otranto* and to its author have been consistently mixed, characterized by a recognizable blend of pleasure

[2] Paul Williams, "Teaching bad writing," *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 13 no. 3 (2016), 372, DOI: 10.1080/14790726.2016.1184682.
[3] Peter Sabor, *Horace Walpole: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Inc., 1987), 1.

and bewilderment, admiration and discomfort."[4] Despite being analyzed by the most prominent scholars of gothic literature, *Otranto* still provokes debates over something as basic as whether the novel is comic or tragic.

Critics have disagreed even about how Walpole's contemporaries responded to the work, and the various interpretations of one particular response are symptomatic of the greater conflict over the novel's affective purpose and whether it succeeds or fails. As a close friend of Walpole's and a writer himself, Thomas Gray has served as a representative of a discerning contemporary reader and as a window into Walpole's intentions. In a letter from Cambridge dated December 30, 1764, Gray thanks Walpole for sending the novel and writes, "It engages our attention here, makes some of us cry a little, and all in general afraid to go to bed o'nights. We take it for a translation, and should believe it to be a true story, if it were not for St. Nicholas."[5] Practically every critic who mentions the novel's reception quotes at least some of this excerpt, but they understand it in many different ways. In the nineteenth century, Sir Walter Scott uses the entirety of this quotation simply as evidence that the novel's first readers were duped by the first edition's pose as a translation of a sixteenth-century Italian story.[6] Scholar Henry Beers, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, contrasts what he apparently reads as Gray's sincere response with the novel's effect in his own time: "Walpole's masterpiece can no longer make anyone cry even a little; and instead of keeping us out of bed, it sends us there—or would, if it were a trifle longer."[7] Sabor, summarizing early responses to the novel in 1987, cites Gray's letter as evidence

[4] Michael Gamer, introduction to *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole (London, Penguin Books, 2001), xiv.
[5] Thomas Gray, *The Works of Thomas Gray*, ed. Thomas James Mathias (London: Shakespeare Press, 1814), 560, Google Books.
[6] Sir Walter Scott, introduction to *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1811), xiv, Google Books.
[7] Henry Augustin Beers, *A History of English Romanticism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & co., ltd., 1899): 238, Google Books.

that some of those who first read it experienced terror.[8] In the same year, however, Elizabeth Napier writes, "What is striking about Gray's letter is the tongue-in-cheek tone he adopts in it towards Walpole's novel, treating it not as a serious piece but as one that plays in a frivolous, satirical way with its readers' emotions: 'it engages out attention here, makes *some of us* cry *a little*, and all *in general* afraid to go to bed o'nights.'"[9] Her italics suggest that Gray's use of qualifiers is a self-evident indicator that he is not describing sincere emotional responses but rather commenting on the novel's attempts at emotional manipulation. E. J. Clery reads it with less certainty, writing that Gray "maybe teasingly" describes this sadness and fear.[10] Ellen Malenas Ledoux, writing more recently, considers that Gray's letter could be mere polite encouragement of a friend or a sincere account of his fear on reading the novel.[11] Perhaps Gray's letter allows for such dissimilar interpretations because he phrased it with purposeful ambiguity, unsure of how Walpole wanted him to respond. And perhaps scholars return to the letter seeking an insider's help in determining what tone Walpole meant the novel to convey.

What is it about this brief novel that inspires so many confident statements about the intentions of the author and the effect on the audience—statements that ultimately conflict with each other? To answer this question, I will interpret a variety of critical responses and examine how *Otranto* both invites and resists a number of affective reading approaches that come freighted with different assumptions about authorial intention and lead to different conclusions about the quality of the work. I will first examine Susan

[8] Sabor, *Critical Heritage*, 14.
[9] Elizabeth R. Napier, *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 79.
[10] E. J. Clery, introduction to *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 2008), xxii.
[11] Ellen Malenas Ledoux, *Social Reform in Gothic Writing: Fantastic Forms of Change, 1764-1834* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 32.

Sontag's definition of camp, considering what encourages a camp reading of *Otranto*, and what available emotions this reading approach forecloses. Then I will turn to the paratexts with which Walpole himself has framed the novel, which provide incongruous suggestions for how to feel about the story. To begin a consideration of how readers respond to these suggestions, I will examine how readers represent their affective agency, or more often lack thereof, in relation to Walpole's supernatural plot. Delving deeply into the text itself, I will explore how exchanges between characters employ mechanics that carry classed and gendered affective associations and how Walpole uses them in a way that demands readings that either ignore some tonal cues or require constant renegotiation. Because of these factors, the assurance with which scholars argue about Walpole's motives and the novel's emotional effects is misplaced; the only assurance we can reasonably have is that the novel is ambiguous. To conclude, I will consider how the novel itself, in its smallest details, suggests a model of reading with emotional ambiguity.

Camp Counseling

Susan Sontag, in her influential 1964 essay "Notes on 'Camp,'" writes that "things are campy, not when they become old—but when we become less involved in them, and can enjoy, instead of be frustrated by, the failure of the attempt."[12] According to Sontag, the camp aesthetic "sees everything in quotation marks," enabling people to find and appreciate artificiality in art and everyday life.[13] The ironic distance implicit in this

[12] Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp' [1964]" in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 60.
[13] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 56.

aesthetic supposedly allows audiences to appreciate what they would otherwise condemn for being false and excessive. Sontag traces the birth of camp to the eighteenth century, citing Walpole, among others, as a progenitor. Walpole's *Otranto* does seem to exemplify camp as Sontag describes it, but readers have been unable to agree on whether its failures are enjoyable or frustrating, whether it is best read with ironic distance, whether Walpole intended it to show proto-camp appreciation, or whether he simply produced something so false and melodramatic that it came to seem campy.

The idea of camp, though not in existence as such in the eighteenth century, fits Walpole's life and work so well that it has been applied to him over and over since the publication of Sontag's essay.[14] Understanding the emotional dynamics of camp, as Sontag explains them, can help clarify what critics imply about Walpole's attitude toward *Otranto*'s subject matter and its readers when they use the term, and how this same attitude has sometimes turned on Walpole's own efforts. In her essay on camp, Sontag uses the term to describe unintentionally ridiculous art, objects, and people (the campy) but also the sophisticated taste that knowingly appreciates the ridiculous (the camp aesthetic). In the same way, critics have perceived Walpole and his famous novel as either inadvertently absurd or consciously reveling in absurdity. For Sontag, camp the aesthetic is a highly developed taste for what is normally considered bad taste, a "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration."[15] The objects of this taste may be melodramatic, but camp enthusiasts enjoy them in a way that is "disengaged, unserious."[16] Critics disagree about

[14] However, scholars usually acknowledge that its application, though appealing, is anachronistic. See, for example, Max Fincher, *Queering Gothic in the Romantic Age: The Penetrating Eye* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Marcie Frank, "Horace Walpole's Family Romances," Modern Philology 100, no. 3 (February 2003), 417-435, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/376658.
[15] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 53.
[16] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 57.

whether Walpole expresses a detached, playful enjoyment of the unnatural and exaggerated in *Otranto* or whether he accidentally produced a novel that others could feel that way about—in other words, whether he was an insider or an outsider. The noun *camp*, according to Sontag, comes from a verb meaning to perform elaborate poses that are only comprehensible to insiders, having "a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders."[17] Similarly, "Camp is esoteric—something of a private code, a badge of identity even."[18] The crucial question for critics seems to be whether Walpole belonged to this private club or not—whether he was laughing or being laughed at.

Scholars who use the term *camp* in relation to Walpole generally argue that he was being playful with *Otranto* and other endeavors, and this perception of his life and work is necessarily tied up in the way Sontag describes camp aficionados. Sontag writes that wealth and leisure allow for the bored, detached pleasure-seeking that drives the cultivation of a camp aesthetic that appreciates the common and vulgar.[19] Walpole, an aristocrat, spent much of his abundant free time rebuilding his villa, Strawberry Hill, as a gothic castle, using cheap materials and filling it with kitschy objects. Watt writes that Walpole "revelled in the incomprehension of visitors to Strawberry Hill, especially foreigners, and displayed a sense of delight in his ability to indulge in what was ostensibly bad taste."[20] Though she is describing a twentieth-century response to commercial oversaturation, she calls her era's camp adherents "aristocrats of taste" allowing us to link

[17] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 57.
[18] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 56.
[19] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 63.
[20] James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre and Cultural Conflict, 1764–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1999, 16. Some scholars have challenged the idea that Strawberry Hill was a mere diversion for Walpole. For instance, Matthew Reeve interprets the villa as a serious expression of Walpole's sexuality. Matthew M. Reeve, "Gothic Architecture, Sexuality, and License at Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill," the *Art Bulletin* 95, no. 3 (2013), DOI: 10.1080/00043079.2013.10786082.

Walpole, the fourth earl of Orford, to this privileged group that seeks a cure for ennui in a life of droll gaucheness.[21] Sontag's camp aristocrats are often homosexual—societal outsiders who establish their own queer insider aesthetic. Similarly, some scholars have described the gothic genre as being bound up in the alleged homosexuality of writers like Walpole, whose lifestyle and aesthetic are interdependent.[22] A camp lifestyle, according to Sontag, involves a vision of a world through the ideas of "Being-as-Playing-a-Role" and "life as theater."[23] This embrace of theatricality resonates with writer Thomas Babington Macaulay's 1833 critique of Walpole, often repeated by modern scholars: "His features were covered by mask within mask . . . He played innumerable parts, and over-acted them all."[24] While Walpole may have seemed like a dilettante or a dandy in other ages, after the publication of Sontag's essay, his personal qualities would be difficult to separate from Sontag's image of the camp cognoscenti.

At the same time as some scholars read Walpole as an intentionally campy aesthete, the lens of camp has also made it easier to read his work as unintentionally campy. Critics who assume that Walpole intended *Otranto* as a grand endeavor, a work that would chill, move, and inspire readers, and who judge the novel to be an extravagant failure in these respects, are more likely to see Walpole not as one of the cognoscenti but as a creator of

[21] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 64.
[22] Scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, George Haggerty, and Robert Miles have written that Walpole was one of a group of potentially homosexual gothic writers, and though Miles stops short of calling the "male" gothic a "uniformly 'queer' genre," he connects the possible homosexuality of Walpole, William Beckford, and Matthew Lewis to their shared aesthetic. He writes that "the work of all three displays a recurrent interest in theatricality, with 'camp,' pastiche, role-playing, excess and androgyny—in other words, with a self-dramatizing self-fashioning." Robert Miles, "Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis," in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 97. Biographer Timothy Mowl insists upon the importance of incorporating Walpole's "camp" behavior into considerations of his work, writing that Walpole "was a sexual outsider and because of this he was also an aesthetic outsider." Timothy Mowl, *Horace Walpole: The Great Outsider* (London: John Murray Ltd., 1996), 6.
[23] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 56.
[24] Review of *Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford, to Sir Horace Mann, British Envoy at the Court of Tuscany*, ed. Lord Dover, the *Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal* (July 1833-January 1834), 227, Google Books.

what Sontag calls naïve camp. Sontag writes, "In naïve, or pure, Camp, the essential element is seriousness, a seriousness that fails," and this serious attempt should have "the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve."[25] It "is art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken seriously because it is 'too much.'"[26] It is, above all, "the attempt to do something extraordinary."[27] Reading *Otranto* as a naïve camp means believing Walpole's statement in his second preface that he intended the novel to remedy the state of literature at the time, in which "the great resources of fancy have been dammed up."[28] It means believing he meant to be the first to "blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern" to create a work of wonder that "accord[s] to the rules of probability."[29] It means believing that he intended a giant falling helmet to be awe-inspiring and terrifying rather than random and absurd, his noble characters to be convincingly tormented rather than parodic, and his domestic characters to heighten the tension and pathos of the story rather than cast ridicule on it. And it means believing that he failed spectacularly in these aims.

The emotional dynamic of camp, as Sontag describes it, depends on recognizing an artwork's grave and grandiose ambitions, judging the art to fall enormously short of those ambitions, and delighting in these shortcomings. Thus, a work is only truly campy when we can determine its intentions. Without knowing whether Walpole is finding delight the naïve, grandiose failures of others by parodying gothic architecture, old romances, or sentimental novels or earnestly collaging his source material into an unexpected

[25] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 59.
[26] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 59.
[27] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 60.
[28] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1765]), 9.
[29] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 9.

monstrosity, readers remain on unstable emotional ground. *The Castle of Otranto* offers opportunities to feel tense, disgusted, amazed, afraid, and sorrowful, but camp reading would dictate that we reject those opportunities. Camp reading, Sontag writes, "refuses both the harmonies of traditional seriousness, and the risks of fully identifying with extreme states of feeling."[30] If we are reading *Otranto* campily, by Sontag's definition, we are assuming that Walpole genuinely wanted us to indulge in these extreme states of feeling, and we are instead reading with playful detachment. However, if we are perceiving Walpole as an adherent to the camp aesthetic, we must either be in on the joke or risk having our emotions played with. After carefully analyzing Walpole's tone, Napier concludes that though his intentions are unclear, he "creates an aesthetic atmosphere that empowers him, as its designer, to cast ridicule on an audience that does not possess the discrimination (or cynicism) to look askance at the work."[31] This statement provides an explanation for the tendency to read the work as comedy—the concern of critics that they will out themselves as insufficiently sophisticated if they respond with fear or sadness. Additionally, the way this statement entangles *Otranto*'s literary techniques, Walpole's motivations, and the audience's responses suggests why the novel has remained a puzzle. I will later demonstrate how Walpole's writing in the novel employs mechanical devices that rely on conflicting literary heritages for their effects, and how the perception of Walpole's intentions is crucial in determining which affective heritage he is drawing on. In the following section, I will discuss how Walpole makes his intentions uncertain even when he states them directly.

[30] Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 62.
[31] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 98.

Paratextual Cathexis

Walpole's poses in relation to his novel have greatly complicated attempts to determine his intentions. The author framed it twice for his readers, first in a way that could easily create a conflict of attitudes toward the novel and its author. He published the first edition in late 1764, presenting it as a translation of an Italian novel from 1529. His preface to the first edition represents the novel as an artifact from a simpler age, in which people would have taken its miraculous occurrences as fact, which encourages modern readers to treat it with indulgence or condescension. Walpole, masquerading as the translator, speculates that in the sixteenth century, "[s]uch a work as the following would enslave a hundred vulgar minds," emphasizing both the story's potential for enthralling fascination and the contempt a modern reader ought to feel for those unrefined readers who would be taken in by its supernatural elements.[32] E. J. Clery, in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, points out that this characterization would implicate Walpole himself as an emotionally manipulative writer for an unsophisticated audience once he acknowledged that he was in fact the author of the novel.[33]

Though the first preface risks making his readers into outsiders, Walpole also offers opportunities for them to join him as insiders in a way that has recalled the aesthetic of camp for some. Setting aside the novel's putative original audience, Walpole's translator persona claims that there is only one proper way to ask his contemporary readers to respond: the "work can only be laid before the public at present as a matter of

[32] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 5.
[33] E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, *1762-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 62-63.

entertainment," and an unfashionably supernatural one.[34] Robert Folkenflik contends that "this rift between an audience responding to the work in the 'medieval' period and a contemporary audience which is encouraged to respond in a totally different and amused way demonstrates that 'camp' has been a part of the Gothic novel from its inception" because even before the term was used for art, gothic writers "displayed an awareness of the effects."[35] Walpole further allows for a camp reading in his description of the servant characters, whose "*naïveté* and simplicity" aid the plot, especially "the womanish terror and foibles of Bianca."[36] By encouraging readers to patronize his servant characters and their most intense emotions before they even begin the novel, Walpole certainly sets up an affective relationship that could be interpreted as camp.

However, Walpole-as-translator also encourages responses beyond campy amusement, though scholars cannot agree if his assessment of the novel clashes with the text in a way that puts his intentions in question. He praises the language's lack of exaggeration and affectation: "There is no bombast, no similes, flowers, digressions, or unnecessary descriptions."[37] He also writes admiringly of its emotional dynamics, asserting that "[t]error, the author's principal engine, prevents the story from ever languishing; and it is so often contrasted by pity, that the mind is kept up in a constant vicissitude of interesting passions."[38] Additionally, in keeping with the moral claims of most novelists in the eighteenth century, he writes, "The piety that reigns throughout, the lessons of virtue that are inculcated, and the rigid purity of the sentiments, exempt this work from the

[34] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 6.
[35] Robert Folkenflik, "The New Model Eighteenth-Century Novel," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 12, no. 2-3 (January-April 2000), 477, DOI: 10.1353/ecf.2000.0040.
[36] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 6-7.
[37] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 6.
[38] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 6.

censure to which romances are but too liable."[39] Agreeing with Napier that these assertions conflict with the tone of the novel itself, Watt writes, "The first preface's claim that the translated work displays 'no bombast' . . . sits uneasily next to the actual behavior and speech of Manfred, just as the preface's praise of *Otranto*'s piety collides with the work's self-evident flippancy and frivolity."[40] Watt reads the first preface as being in tension with the "actual," "self-evident" experience of the novel, which to him lacks the kind of tonal contrast Walpole claims. For Watt, the apparent disconnect between the first preface's description of the work and the work itself creates discomfort or even violent collision. This judgment, however, may rely on critical and emotional approaches that reject ambiguity in a way Walpole did not. Ledoux reads the first preface's description as being in keeping with what she characterizes harmoniously as a "mixture of tragic and burlesque tones" that she also finds in Walpole's writing about politics. Walpole's letters prove for her that Walpole "perceived the world as a constant negotiation of the thin line separating the moving from the ridiculous."[41]

The addition of the preface to the second edition, in which Walpole confesses his authorship, presents even more difficulties for readers trying to determine how to approach the novel. In the second preface, Walpole writes that he was attempting to combine modern realism, with its emphasis on natural dialogue and behavior, with the miraculous occurrences of ancient romance. William Warner, in *Licensing Entertainment*, argues that in this statement, Walpole "offers an implicit endorsement of a mindless but entertaining practice of absorptive reading that requires a willing suspension of

[39] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 7.
[40] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 28.
[41] Ledoux, *Social Reform*, 33.

disbelief."[42] But this idea of vacuous consumption underestimates the number of potential emotional responses Walpole allows and the difficulty of moving among them, especially for early readers. For instance, Clery describes the betrayal and conflict Walpole's contemporaries felt when he revealed the truth about the novel. They initially "took their pleasure from the tale within the terms of a legitimating set of presuppositions," thinking they were following the critical norms that allowed readers to enjoy a superstitious work only if it was from another age, and found themselves actually guilty of liking an "illegitimate" novel.[43] While Walpole violated the literary norms of his time, he also called upon Shakespeare in the second preface to defend the scenes in which his solemn, aristocratic characters interact with his comic servant characters. He followed Shakespeare's example of mixing tragedy and comedy in the dialogue of his high and low characters because, he writes, "the contrast between the sublime of the one, and the *naïveté* of the other, sets the pathetic of the former in a stronger light.[44] Napier presents three options for Walpole's intentions behind a claim like this, suggesting that he was either deluded, defensive, or "engaging in an intentional burlesque," with the latter option being the one she seems to find most convincing.[45] She reads both prefaces as "veering . . . from an apparently serious to an obviously ironic tone," which serves as a partial justification for her argument that *Otranto* could be intentionally comical.[46] In contrast, Clery, in her introduction to the novel, reads the second preface as an earnest manifesto in which

[42] William B. Warner, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 291.
[43] Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 55, 60-61. Folkenflik takes issue with Warner's characterization of the response to *Otranto*, using it as the occasion for his discussion of camp. Folkenflik, "New Model Eighteenth-Century Novel," 477.
[44] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 10.
[45] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 82.
[46] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 77.

Otranto was "reconstructed" as a bold new literary experiment.[47] These descriptions of veering and reconstructing speak to the effort Walpole requires of readers even before the novel begins, effort that more often than not still leaves them mired in uncertainty.

It is possible that Walpole intended in his prefatory materials to open various possible ways to receive his novel, not all for the same reader, but for different kinds of readers. In the second edition, Walpole includes a dedicatory poem that he addresses to Lady Mary Coke, expressing the expectation that the "hapless tale" of the "gentle maid" in the book's "melancholy pages" will "draw the tear adown [Lady Coke's] cheek."[48] Scholars are divided over whether Walpole is mocking sentimentality with the poem or inviting it.[49] George Dekker, however, proposes that Walpole cannily courted multiple kinds of audiences and sees in the poem a strategic attempt to encourage a particular kind of reading from a particular portion of his audience. He argues that though Walpole did not court female readers as a general practice, this dedication acknowledges that audience, acting as a model of the sort of sympathetic reading Walpole hoped to inspire in women. Dekker describes the poem as "an appeal to women readers that envisages a cordial creative engagement between them and the author."[50] As we will see later, some contemporary female writers certainly accepted his invitation to read into the sentimental aspects of the novel, though it is not clear whether his invitation was made cynically or not. It is possible, given the inclusion of multiple attitudes in Walpole's prefatory material, that

[47] Clery, introduction, xii.
[48] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 15.
[49] Napier considers whether Walpole's choice of Coke as the person to whom he dedicates the novel indicates his comic enjoyment of overblown performances of emotion, citing his description of her elsewhere as a person who "shed tears if a Duchess's [parakeet] was moulting." Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 98. Clery instead speculates that Walpole included the poem because "[p]erhaps the rapid sale of the first edition gave him the courage of his convictions" in his "desire to elicit pity." Clery, introduction, xxii.
[50] George G. Dekker, *The Fictions of Romantic Tourism: Radcliffe, Scott, and Mary Shelley* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 61.

he meant to keep readers emotionally off-balance, whether for his own amusement or because that is how he himself experienced the world.

Because Walpole presents an array of possibilities for responses to his novel, many scholars have turned to his voluminous correspondence to seek clues about his true intentions. His letters to friends, especially those in his inner circle, should supposedly reveal how he felt about his novel and how he intended others to feel. Yet here, too, there is more conflict. Watt sees in Walpole's letters a defensive desire to minimize his investment in the novel as well as a playful strategy to deceive and confuse. He cites a letter to Robert Jephson in which Walpole objects to William Warburton's praise of the novel's ability to evoke fear and sorrow, despite his own preface's description of terror and pity. Watt writes that "Walpole mocked such an inappropriate defence of his work";[51] however, the actual letter, while still conflicting with other accounts of Walpole's intentions, does not clearly mock Warburton. Walpole merely writes that "Bishop Warburton . . . observed that the plan of The Castle of Otranto was regularly a drama (an intention I am sure I do not pretend to have conceived; nor, indeed, can I venture to affirm that I had any intention at all but to amuse myself—no, not even a plan, till some pages were written)."[52] While his overly tentative language ("I am sure I do not pretend"; "nor, indeed, can I venture to affirm") could be interpreted as humorous, it could also be read as a symptom of intense sensitivity to the way he and his work might be perceived. Robert Kiely writes, "Though he tried to be detached about it, his letters show that he was offended when people laughed in the wrong places."[53] It seems we will never have a thoroughly persuasive answer to the question of

[51] Watt, *Contesting the Gothic*, 30.
[52] Horace Walpole, *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, volume 6 (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), 72-73.
[53] Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 42.

Walpole's intentions with *Otranto*. However, responses to the novel can tell us much about the way this work invites various responses not only in its authorial paratexts but in the text itself, even when readers do not experience themselves as having options for how to feel. These various affective options can help clarify how the root of the text's indeterminacy is its formal and even mechanical construction, which has implications for how we read emotionally ambiguous works like *Otranto*.

Otranto's Compelling Plot

One of the areas that provokes the most various responses to *Otranto* is its supernatural plot. The profusion of strange occurrences in the novel can be read as thrilling, terrifying, absurd, or exhausting. These occurrences begin early in the novel, when the scheming Prince Manfred's son is crushed to death by a massive helmet, hindering Manfred's plans to maintain his unjust hold on the castle Otranto, as the supernatural forces that animate the castle fight back and Manfred's daughter, Matilda, falls in love with the rightful owner, Theodore. The frantic pace of shocking events has spurred speculation over Walpole's affective intentions with the plot and led to interest in how his early readers responded to these unusual developments. Clery confidently asserts that "Walpole's purpose is to overwhelm the reader with an excess of stimuli, rather than to tantalize."[54] This is a bold claim to make, considering that Walpole's letters offer us only contradictory evidence of his intentions with the novel. Clery seems to base this determination on the idea that it would be impossible to read the novel without eventually succumbing to overwhelm in the face of

[54] Clery, introduction, xx.

its apparitions and revelations. She justifies this interpretation by writing that "[e]ven admirers such as Clara Reeve and [Sir Walter] Scott were forced to confess that the ceaseless parade of horrors had a diminishing effect."[55] The idea that these writers were "forced" against their will to "confess" that it was unfeasible to remain responsive to the novel's emotional onslaught describes these writers' responses as much more of an embarrassed defeat in a valiant effort than they themselves seem to present. It also characterizes Walpole's supernatural plot as a structure that compels a particular affective response—a theme that occurs often in descriptions of the novel, despite the fact that these supposedly involuntary responses actually vary quite a bit.

Though both Reeve and Scott, like Clery, describe the emotional dynamics of the novel as unavoidable, the inevitability they describe is not the impossibility of feeling but is rather due to the functional dynamics of the novel. While Clery summarizes these writers' responses as the attempt and failure of an exercise of free will, Reeve and Scott do not seem to have experienced their responses as a struggle so much as a foregone conclusion. They use mechanical language to describe the reading process, drawing on the eighteenth-century term for plot devices that derives from the contemporary interest in the structures of the world.[56] Scott, in his 1811 introduction to the novel, writes that the novel's "supernatural machinery . . . presses too hard and too constantly upon the same feelings in the reader's mind, to the hazard of diminishing the elasticity of the spring upon which it should operate."[57] Peter Otto, elaborating on Scott's framing of the novel, writes that *Otranto*'s combinations of the natural and the supernatural "make us curious about the

[55] Clery, introduction, xxi.
[56] For more on the development of this idea, see Joseph Drury, "The Novel and the Machine in the Eighteenth Century," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 42, no. 2 (2009): 337-42, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27764325.
[57] Scott, introduction, xxvii.

machinery through which they have been produced," and Scott's introduction and Walpole's prefaces embrace "this self-reflexive turn" away from immersion in the novel by drawing attention to its machinery.[58] Though Otto, unlike Scott, suggests the reader's agency ("curious"), he also describes the apparatus of this response ("make," "self-reflexive") in a way that suggests there is only one way to feel about *Otranto*'s "machinery," though it is a different feeling than the insensibility Scott depicts. The prefaces that Otto claims invite awareness of the machinery do so literally—in the first preface, terror is "the author's principal engine" and the story's "machinery is invented"; the second preface defends the modernization of old-fashioned romances, whose subjects were, in contrast to *Otranto*, "as unnatural as the machines employed to put them in motion."[59]

Perhaps because Walpole and Scott brought this "machinery" to the attention of early readers, or perhaps because readers of the time were already inclined to think of the supernatural as a device, making its constructed nature the most apparent thing about it, this machinery has been mentioned in reviews since the beginning, in ways that allow for different degrees of agency from the reader. A writer in the *Monthly Review* (whom Sabor identifies as sentimental author John Langhorne) who wrote indignantly against the book after discovering its hoax, initially approved of it, though with reservations. The review begins, "Those who can digest the absurdities of Gothic fiction, and bear the machinery of ghosts and goblins, may hope, at least, for considerable entertainment from the performance before us."[60] Interestingly, while still placing the emphasis on the workings of

[58] Peter Otto, "Disoriented, Twice Removed from the Real, Racked by Passion in Walpole's Protean Theatres of Sensation," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 27 no. 3-4 (spring-summer 2015), 690-691, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/584630.
[59] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 6, 7, 9.
[60] Review of *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole, the *Monthly Review* 32 (February 1765), 97, Google Books.

the novel, this writer allows that readers may respond in different ways to the "machinery" of the supernatural. However, he follows this with praise of the work and its author phrased universally, implying there is only one correct judgment (the diction is "accurate and elegant," the writer shows "the most perfect knowledge of mankind"). Perhaps critics writing before supernatural works became more acceptable in the later eighteenth century were reluctant to expose their feelings about a work like *Otranto*, which may have deterred them from making universal proclamations about its effects that could be interpreted as their own reactions. Later critics like Scott had benefitted from a growing acceptance of the marvelous, so this demonstration of distaste was not as necessary and he could confidently present his own response as the only possible one. Similarly, Clara Reeve, in her 1778 preface to her "literary offspring" of *Otranto*, *The Old English Baron*, writes with assurance that Walpole's "machinery is so violent, that it destroys the effect it is intended to excite" and that when readers' anticipation is "wound up," the overdone supernatural elements "destroy the work of the imagination, and, instead of attention, excite laughter."[61]

Reeve shows certainty about the affective intentions built into the plot and the way in which these intentions fail humorously, but other writers have acknowledged that assessments of the novel's emotional effects depend on doubtful judgments of Walpole's purpose and genre, which suggests that critics play a larger role in these effects than they might acknowledge. Historian John Dunlop reflected in 1814, "It has been much doubted, whether the *Castle of Otranto* was seriously or comically intended; if seriously, it is a most feeble attempt to excite awe or terror."[62] He echoes Reeve's contention that the novel's "machinery" itself ruins what may have been intended to be terrifying. And yet Dunlop is

[61] Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron* (London: Dilly, 1778), vii, iii, vi, Google Books.
[62] John Dunlop, *The History of Fiction*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1814), 382, Google Books.

less confident that this is the intention, as plot features like the giant sword, the bloody-nosed statue, and the hero being imprisoned within the giant helmet that crushed the young prince "look as if devised in ridicule of preceding extravagance."[63] Yet in describing "this species of composition," the kind of works that Walpole seems to be parodying, Dunlop describes not medieval romances but the gothic genre Walpole helped establish: "hollow groans, gothic windows that exclude the light, and trap-doors with flights of steps descending into dismal vaults."[64] This raises the question of whether, as time passes, the judgments of readers, even scholars, become colored by the gothic works that followed *Otranto*, as they anachronistically see in the novel an attempt to mock a genre that was not yet formed. In the twentieth century, David Punter argues that Walpole's use of the supernatural is meant "to interest and amuse us by its self-conscious quaintness,"[65] a contention that is difficult to prove with the distance of history, since what readers today find self-conscious and quaint may not have been registered as such at the time of composition. Ahmet Süner even goes so far as to argue that Otranto "is a not the kind of unintentional comedy in which we laugh condescendingly at the poor execution. Rather it is a comedy that is exquisitely designed by Walpole in order to give the impression that it is not a comedy," and that he writes poorly for this purpose.[66] While allowing for intriguing arguments, these sorts of assertions most often rely on assumptions about "us": the literary knowledge, sensibility, interpretive processes, and feelings "we" as readers possess,

[63] Dunlop, *History of Fiction*, 382.
[64] Dunlop, *History of Fiction*, 382.
[65] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, vol. 1 (New York: Longman Publishing, 1996), 46.
[66] Ahmet Süner, "The Comic Tragedy of Mere Men and Women: The Ambiguously Distracting Use of Laughter in *The Castle of Otranto* and Its Prefaces," *Atlantis. Journal of the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies* 38, no. 2 (2016), 14, Academic Search Complete.

without marking these attributes as ones of a particular kind of late twentieth- or early twenty-first-century scholar.

Because engaging only with the perspectives of readers like ourselves or like the author can limit what we know about the novel and its effects,[67] it is important to see what is apparent to readers who share critiques of the novel outside of academia. Though some amateur reviewers today join scholars in reading *Otranto*'s plot as parodic, more often they seem take it as a sincerely written work of genre fiction, which makes it clear that the plot itself does not disallow impressions other than the comic. One blogger, who read *Otranto* for a course on Jane Austen, was able to enjoy it more than her classmates by appreciating it as a straightforward thriller: "It was an entertaining story with plenty of plot twists, some more predictable than others."[68] This is similar to my own students, who have liked the novel's fast pace and surprising developments, which are made even more surprising for today's readers who have been trained to expect certain outcomes from romantic or gothic stories. Another amateur reviewer critiques it as a failed attempt: "The plotting is extremely slapdash, with crucial details added as and when they are needed, with absolutely no self-consciousness about the artificiality of this technique."[69] This writer sees none of the careful calculations some scholars attribute to Walpole, even writing that "the plot lurches unsteadily from one crisis to another," as if without sufficient authorial control, the story stumbles along on its own ineffectively. Some scholars would likely argue that amateur critics do not possess the biographical, historical, or literary context to see the

[67] For insightful studies on scholarly moods and norms, see Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique*, Steven Goldsmith's *Blake's Agitation*, and Deidre Lynch's *Loving Literature*.
[68] Bridget, "#965: The Castle of Otranto—Horace Walpole," Dog-Eared & Dog-Tagged, April 13, 2011, http://dogearedanddogtagged.com/2011/04/13/965-the-castle-of-otranto-horace-walpole/.
[69] Hansel714, review of *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole, LibraryThing, December 14, 2007, http://www.librarything.com/work/187612/reviews/22404224.

comic elements that professional critics do, but Ledoux, a scholar writing very recently, also argues for the work's sincerity. I will return to this possible historical change in humor later in the chapter.

Reading between the Lines

Now that I have discussed how different readers convey their affective experience with *Otranto*'s plot and their own agency in relation to it, I can focus in on the often-overlooked mechanical details that could be subtly cueing readers to respond in certain ways. Despite the way scholars parse the conventional reasons for the novel's emotional effects, they have largely neglected aspects of the text that could account for some portion of these effects—and one of these in particular is quite obvious to amateur reviewers. Numerous online critics note that the formatting of dialogue in the novel causes problems. Characters alternate speech without quotation marks and sometimes without speech tags like "she said." Walpole instead employs dashes to differentiate speakers, but not in every case, and he also often uses dashes for the stuttering speech of individuals. Many scenes contain characters whose speech is broken by their emotion and interrupted by other characters, meaning that there are sometimes dozens of dashes in a single paragraph. These long paragraphs omit the line breaks that are commonly used today to separate speakers, producing dialogue with few pauses and few opportunities for determining who is speaking, with the exception of characters who begin their speech with interjections, which I will address later on. One online reviewer describes the effect of Walpole's treatment of dialogue as both exciting and disorienting: "the prose has a breathless, breathy precipitate

feel to it . . . There are no quotations for speech and no paragraphing here either: speakers merge in and out of each other and in and out of the narrative voice in an endlessly long paragraph, which sometimes extends for a whole chapter."[70] It is clear that this typographical choice can affect how readers feel about or even understand the novel, but this feature seems to be invisible or uninteresting to scholars, judging by its lack of inclusion in studies of *Otranto*. The variability of typography in narrative makes it difficult to analyze, usually with a small payoff, but in this case knowing that the novel's earliest printings and today's scholarly editions use this particular format while rejecting more popular options can aid speculation about how Walpole and scholars have negotiated the novel's emotional ambiguity.

The printer of the first edition of *Otranto* would have had many choices for treating dialogue, and he the chose one with great risk of confusion. Unlike today, when editors routinely impose a standardized style for formatting, grammar, and punctuation, printers in the eighteenth century had many acceptable options. Vivienne Mylne, after researching dialogue in novels, concludes that English printers began to experiment with different typographical treatments of dialogue in the seventeenth century.[71] When Walpole was writing, printers employed any of several methods: italics, alternating italics and roman type for different speakers, single or double inverted commas, lines headed by character names as in a play script, dashes, line breaks, or no distinctive treatment at all.[72] This means that an author who printed his own work or had a say in its typesetting could select whatever method best suited the overall aesthetic or effect he sought. Although a range of

[70] Hansel714, review.
[71] Vivienne Mylne, "The Punctuation of Dialogue in Eighteenth-Century French and English Fiction," the *Library* 6, no. 1 (1979): 43-61, DOI: 10.1093/library/s6-I.1.43.
[72] Mylne, "Punctuation of Dialogue," 57.

options was available, quotation marks were the most popular choice for dialogue even before they became the standard practice, around 1780.[73] Dashes were less popular but still common as punctuation for dialogue, though they also signified interruption, confusion, and heightened emotion, in addition to standing in for other forms of end punctuation.[74] Thus, the use of dashes to show a change of speaker could easily become unclear when used inconsistently or combined with dashes as punctuation, both of which *Otranto* does. Mylne's study provides information that suggests that the first printer of *Otranto* made a deliberate but not unusual choice to mark dialogue with dashes rather than the more common inverted commas, introducing typographical chaos in which the marking of speech can intensify the passion and turmoil of certain scenes, which could encourage an emotionally powerful but muddled reading experience.

This printing choice is especially important if we believe that Walpole, who owned a press at Strawberry Hill, conveyed his typographical preferences to the printer, or even that he was the printer. Most scholars, including biographers and bibliographers,[75] accept that the first edition of *Otranto* was printed by Thomas Lownds at Fleet Street in London, as the title page claims, but at least two scholars question that fact. In the Broadview edition of the novel, Frederick S. Frank writes in a publication timeline that the first edition was actually printed at Strawberry Hill, on Walpole's own press, and Ledoux cites Frank

[73] Mylne, "Punctuation of Dialogue," 58. Ian Watt, in contrast, asserts in his introduction to *Tristram Shandy* that dashes were more frequently used for speech than quotation marks, but without knowing how he gathered this information, I trust Mylne's study more. Ian Watt, introduction to *Tristram Shandy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), xliv, qtd. in Roger B. Moss, "Sterne's Punctuation," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15, no. 2 (winter 1981-1982), 195. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2738241.
[74] Mylne, "Punctuation of Dialogue," 60.
[75] See especially A. T. Hazen, *A Bibliography of Horace Walpole* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 52.

when she repeats this idea in her study.[76] Without any additional information from Frank, who has passed away, this theory seems questionable at best.[77] However, there are some reasons to believe Frank's assertion. Though the first edition abbreviates Lownds's first name as "Tho.," in every other edition I have found that was printed by him, he abbreviates his name "T.," which could suggest that Walpole only made it look like Lownds had printed the book, which would help distance the pseudonymously published work from himself. Whether or not Lownds printed the book, it seems likely that Walpole was the one who made the choice to include multiple dashes in the dialogue, because judging from three other narratives Lownds printed, he did not make a habit of typesetting with excessive dashes.[78] Walpole himself, in the Strawberry Hill printing of his essay "The Life of Mr. George Vertue," uses quotation marks for speech, but in the first brief paragraph employs four dashes to indicate a turn in his train of thought, demonstrating that he was comfortable writing with many dashes and was probably responsible for the dashes that proliferate in the first edition of *Otranto*.[79]

Because the first edition is likely the one that most reflects Walpole's preferences as far as typography and punctuation and because these features in the first edition enhance the novel's ambiguity, it is important to consider how alterations made to later editions

[76] Frederick S. Frank, "Publication History of *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysterious Mother*," in *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysterious Mother*, ed. Frederick S. Frank (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press Ltd., 2003): 44; Ledoux, *Social Reform*, 25.

[77] George Haggerty, author of a recent book on Walpole's correspondence, recently wrote that the idea "seems like an amusing fiction." Eighteenth-Century Questions Quick Link, Facebook, June 29, 2017.

[78] See *The Anti-Gallican* (1757), *The Voyages and Adventures of Captain Robert Boyle* (1762), and *The Discovery* (1764), the first using quotation marks and the latter two using no special dialogue formatting, aside from speech tags.

[79] Horace Walpole, "The Life of Mr. George Vertue," in *A Catalogue of Engravers, Who Have Been Born, or Resided in England; Digested by Mr. Horace Walpole from the MSS. of Mr. George Vertue; to Which Is Added an Account of the Life and Works of the Latter*, vol. 5 (Twickenham: Strawberry Hill, 1763), 1. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

could change the effect of the text. Some editions have added quotation marks, such as the famous 1811 edition introduced by Scott, which is identical to today's inexpensive Dover edition. Some have even broken paragraphs to show a change of speaker, as early as the 1793 Wenman and Hodgson edition. Any such edition would make it easier to distinguish which character is speaking, which should lessen the novel's disorienting effect, and would reduce the number of dashes, cutting down on what could be read as visual markers of disturbance and amplified emotion. Montague Summers resisted this trend of altering the dialogue format by reproducing the first edition's text in the 1924 Constable edition, but at least as early as the 1964 Oxford version, scholarly editions of *Otranto* tend to use the 1798 printing, *The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford*, as the model for their text, with the justification that it was the last edition of the novel that Walpole was involved with and that it remedies earlier errors.[80] The first edition and the 1798 *Works* edition both use dashes in dialogue and eschew quotation marks; however, the *Works* edition capitalizes after the dash to indicate a change in speaker, making it easier to tell who is talking, while the first edition does not. For example, from the first edition: "—poor *Diego*! I do not believe he will ever recover it! recover what? said *Manfred*."[81] Versus *Works*: "—Poor Diego! I do not believe he will ever recover it! Recover what? said Manfred."[82] Notice that neither uses dashes consistently to introduce a new speaker, and despite the speech tag "said," it is difficult to keep up with the speech attribution without quotation marks and

[80] Oxford, the edition preferred by many scholars, still uses this text as a template, as do Broadview and Penguin. This edition was printed for G. G. and J. Robinson and J. Edwards, and Hazen writes that Mary Berry, Walpole's friend and the daughter of official editor Robert Berry, collected the writings and prepared them according to Walpole's manuscript directions. Hazen, *Bibliography*, 75.
[81] Horace Walpole [under pseudonym William Marshal], *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Tho. Lownds, 1765 [actually 1764]), 37.
[82] Horace Walpole, *The Works of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford*, vol. 2, ed. George Vertue (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1798), 27, Google Books.

line breaks. But the first edition is significantly harder to read because it does not indicate a change of speaker with capitalization. Knowing that Walpole had many options available for representing dialogue, we could interpret his choice of a confusing method as part of a desire to create ambiguity, which today's scholarly editions downplay somewhat.

What edition scholars use may actually influence the kinds of arguments they make. Though Kiely uses Montague Summers's Constable edition, based on the first edition, most of the other scholars who have considered Walpole's tone use Oxford editions that reproduce the 1798 *Works* edition.[83] These scholars, as we have seen, use decisive language when making assertions about the novel's humor or seriousness, and yet the editions they use maintain ambiguity in dialogue by rejecting quotation marks, while also minimizing some of the text's original ambiguity by introducing capital letters for changes in speakers and, as I will discuss later, reducing old-fashioned interjections. Süner, interestingly, also uses Oxford but adds quotation marks to the dialogue, as Williams does with a different edition. Perhaps the way the text's dialogue style compounds the novel's tonal ambiguity adds to the scholarly satisfaction of solving the puzzle of the text's tone. Though most scholars do not go as far as Süner and Williams in elucidating even the changes of speakers with new punctuation and formatting, they do dissect other mechanical features in order to make conclusive statements about the novel's effect. In the close readings that follow, I will use the standard scholarly Oxford/*Works* edition, contrasted with the first edition where appropriate, to instead focus on the ways in which the novel presents affective ambiguities that cannot be resolved decisively. Ultimately, I will argue that these ambiguities that persist even in the smallest details of the text

[83] Namely Clery, Haggerty, Ledoux, Napier, and Watt.

encourage readers to remain open to multiple affective possibilities, either simultaneously or in quick succession.

Scholars who consider the emotional dynamics of Walpole's dialogue between noble and low-ranking characters tend to dismiss Walpole's assertion that it is Shakespearean in its moving combination of comedy and tragedy, but this dismissal seems to rely on some preconceived notions. The critical language that scholars use when describing the effect of the servants' comedy in conjunction with the nobles' tragedy not only disallows alternate readings but also characterizes comedy in a way that implies bias in this context. Napier argues that "a cursory examination" is all that is needed to determine that Walpole's allegedly Shakespearean scenes are simply ridiculous.[84] According to her, Manfred's domestics "sink all into comedy" by contrasting his bluster and undercutting his authority, and the servant Bianca's contributions to the dialogue with the aristocratic Matilda lead to the "degeneration" that turns a potentially sentimental scene into parody.[85] Clery agrees that Napier is "surely right" that "the servants in Otranto tend merely to undermine the woes of their masters, repeatedly bringing about comic deflation."[86] Süner calls the comic nature of Otranto an "open secret" and, in analyzing a scene between Manfred and Bianca, writes, "The tragic cast of the work and its supposed propriety are discarded through the vulgarizing connection forged between Manfred's princely ambitions and Bianca's domestic one."[87] These scholars write as if it is evident and even immediately obvious that *Otranto*'s supposed tragicomic exchanges are actually just comic, despite Walpole's claims and the responses of many readers to whom this has not been readily apparent. Yet they

[84] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 82.
[85] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 83-84, 86.
[86] Clery, introduction, xix.
[87] Süner, "Comic Tragedy," 12, 22.

also take the time to dissect the comic workings of these exchanges, which emphasizes that affective judgments rely on interpretations that are not, after all, automatic and invariable. The language of lowering ("sink," "deflation") that these scholars use is likely their purposeful way to parallel the subordination of the high-toned dialogue with the subordination of the high-ranking Manfred and Matilda's concerns to the low-ranking servants' concerns, which partakes in conventional ways of classifying genres and people. However, it is notable that these scholars imply that the speech of these servants debases any scene they inhabit, that their interests and anxieties are necessarily laughable, and that the coexistence of high- and low-ranking characters and serious and humorous tones must result in a power struggle in which one party or feeling dominates and suppresses the other.

If scholars tend toward reductive readings of *Otranto*'s servants, Walpole encourages it by portraying the first prominent domestics in the novel as interchangeable. In the scene in which the servants Jaquez and Diego report a supernatural sight to Manfred, they are only minimally differentiated: "Jaquez and I, my lord—Yes, I and Diego, interrupted the second, who came up in still greater consternation—Speak one of you at a time, said Manfred; I ask you, where is the princess? We do not know, said they both together: but we are frightened out of our wits [. . .] your highness would not believe our eyes."[88] They speak for each other or in unison, and they express themselves as if they share both intellect and organs. This is not only the first scene with named servants but also one of the first scenes with dashes in the dialogue, and of these early scenes, it contains the most dashes due to the length of the exchange, the frequency of changes in speaker, and

[88] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 33.

the number of interruptions. Given the difficulty of determining who is speaking amid the many dashes and the fact that Jaquez and Diego are virtually indistinguishable, even thoroughly trained readers would need to put in a great amount of effort for small reward if they pay attention to the details of this scene. But if this scene sets a precedent that allows readers to place similar scenes in the same conventional category, they may be more likely to read later servant characters as equally undeveloped and their multiply dashed dialogue as equally comic, despite important differences in these later scenes.

Though Bianca is a more developed and ambiguous character than Diego and Jaquez and Matilda a more compassionate character than Manfred, the fact that the scene between Diego, Jaquez, and Manfred precedes the one with Matilda and Bianca, and that the latter scene echoes the former in some ways, might incline readers to see the characters and situations as more similar than they are. As I noted, the former scene could have primed readers to view scenes with multiple dashes as comic. Bianca and Matilda's dialogue includes some interruptions and faltering speeches, making the number of dashes comparable to the earlier scene with Diego and Jaquez. If a reader were to merely glance at the page, it could suggest comedy instantaneously, which would help explain why Napier claims a reader can see the humor of these servant scenes with a "cursory examination." I will address the possible connotations of dashes in more detail shortly. Aside from the similarity of punctuation in the two scenes, if readers perceived a humorous power struggle and tonal conflict between Manfred and Diego and Jaquez, they may be predisposed to read the scene with Matilda and Bianca similarly. Walpole even invites this conflation by giving Manfred and Matilda a similar line of dialogue in their respective conversations with their servants. When Jaquez, Diego, and other gathered servants ask

(reasonably) that Manfred have the castle exorcized of spirits, he interrupts them by shouting, "—Peace, dotards!"[89] Similarly, Matilda silences Bianca with "Peace!" when they hear a noise that turns out to be Theodore and Bianca says (correctly) that the castle is haunted. Then, when Bianca repeatedly asks Matilda to let her ask Theodore whether his apparent sadness is due to love, Matilda shouts, "—Peace, simpleton!"[90] This similarity places both noble characters in the position of the reasonable authority exasperated by ridiculous requests from subordinates, brushing off their silly ideas, regardless of whether they are truly silly or not. The alterations in the *Works* edition could enhance this impression, since that edition uses commas instead of the original exclamation points for Manfred's "peace! dotards" and Matilda's "peace! simpleton."[91] The original placement of the exclamation point could indicate the urgent outburst of an overwhelmed person, but the comma does not. The revision has the effect of emphasizing the imperative, making both characters seem more commanding. But while Manfred attempts to only control his servants, Matilda engages with Bianca, first asking her to listen for what she thinks is a voice, and later following up her demand for silence with an explanation for why it would be rash to assume that love is Theodore's problem. Bianca and Matilda have a more equal relationship than Manfred and the people who serve him, but when noticing only the parallels in these master-servant scenes, the complexity of the women's scene fades from view.

[89] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 36. And earlier, when Manfred is attempting to determine how Theodore escaped from his confinement under the helmet, an unnamed servant interrupts him "officiously" with the (true) assertion that Theodore has gone through the trap door that leads underground, and Manfred snaps, "Peace! blockhead." 31.
[90] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 42-43.
[91] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 1st ed., 40, 56.

This complexity includes Matilda and Bianca's humorous verbal interplay, which could be read as temporarily lightening the mood or as overriding the sentiment of the scene entirely. Though some of Bianca and Matilda's dialogue would be difficult to read as anything but comic in this scene, there are also moments that I find very moving. For instance, Matilda's speech when she dismisses Bianca's theory that Manfred was secretly planning a marriage for Matilda. Matilda reflects on her father's lifelong coldness toward her and the pain that his cruelty to her kind mother brings her:

> What hast thou seen in Manfred's behaviour since my brother's death that bespeaks any increase in tenderness to me? No, Bianca, his heart was ever a stranger to me—but he is my father, and I must not complain. Nay, if heaven shuts my father's heart against me, it over-pays my little merit in the tenderness of my mother—O that dear mother! Yes, Bianca, 'tis there I feel the rugged temper of Manfred. I can support his harshness to me with patience; but it wounds my soul when I am witness to his causeless severity towards her.[92]

It is possible to read even this speech as comic, if the reader is predisposed to interpret all master/servant dialogue as the masters speechifying and the servants puncturing their overinflated feeling. Indeed, immediately after this solemn speech, Bianca trivializes Matilda's concern for her mother, and Matilda retorts in a witty exchange: "Oh madam, said Bianca, all men use their wives so, when they are weary of them.—And yet you congratulated me just now, said Matilda, when you fancied my father intended to dispose of me."[93] The question is whether this comic moment diminishes the seriousness of what Matilda expresses before it, or whether, as Walpole claims in the second preface, it complements it.

[92] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 40.
[93] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 40.

Which effect this and other affectively mixed scenes achieve seems to depend on what the reader focuses on and the kind of distinctions the reader makes, which appear to be the result of expectations and associations that are created by genre, by the novel itself, and even by typographical features. Dashes, which Walpole uses plentifully in the Matilda/Bianca scene and the Jaquez/Diego/Manfred scene, carried surprising associations for some eighteenth-century readers, in addition to the comic association Walpole may have inadvertently established within the novel. Like the dash as a dialogue marker, which was ungoverned by rules of style in the eighteenth century, the dash as punctuation was a matter of preference, with no clear guide to its syntactical usage.[94] Janine Barchas writes that it was common in the eighteenth century for authors to allow the compositor of the book to make choices about formatting and punctuation, which bibliographers call "accidentals" due to the assumption that they were not intentional parts of the author's book.[95] Some authors, however, were also printers and thus controlled their own accidentals, like Samuel Richardson, and Horace Walpole is likely to have controlled his as well. Even authors who were not printers sometimes determined their accidentals, as Henry Fielding did, and Barchas suggests that his sister, Sarah Fielding, did as well. Henry Fielding famously edited the second edition of his sister's novel, *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), in the process aggressively removing many of Sarah Fielding's dashes. Barchas explains that in the eighteenth century, even though dashes were a matter of preference, for some people this preference reeked of popular lower-class writers like Grub Street author-printer John Dunton. Henry Fielding's paring of his sister's dashes thus

[94] See M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), for an account of how punctuation changed over time.
[95] Janine Barchas, *Graphic Design, Print Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 157.

erases a visual taint of vulgarity. And because Henry included a preface that explained his edits as correcting mistakes that resulted from Sarah's gender and education, Barchas argues that Henry Fielding subtly implies that the style of his rival Richardson, who was known for his dashes, is "unlearned, non-aristocratic, immature, and feminine."[96] We do not know if Walpole used dashes as a parody of Dunton's Grub Street writing, or of Richardsonian sentimental writing, but it may have appeared that way to his contemporaries and could still to scholars of eighteenth-century literature.

While the very presence of dashes could suggest inept writing to some readers, novelists have also earned praise for using this form of punctuation to convey their characters' internal states. Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, which began to be published in 1759 (about five years before Walpole wrote *Otranto*), could have influenced Walpole with its experimental punctuation, including dashes. Ian Watt admires Sterne's dashes for expressing Shandy's self-censorship and sudden turns in thought and feeling, distinguishing it from the more common "amateurish writing" that employs a similar number of dashes.[97] Though judging from his correspondence, Walpole was no admirer of Sterne, he may have appreciated the opportunities for both whimsy and complexity that his punctuation allowed. Richardson's famous dashes, Mylne notes, tends to increase with representations of intense emotion, though they can also convey ridiculousness, when a character is particularly irrational or pompous.[98] This opens the possibility that Walpole meant his dashes to suggest the

[96] Barchas, *Graphic Design*, 155, 170.
[97] Ian Watt, "The Comic Syntax of Tristram Shandy," in *Studies in Criticism and Aesthetics, 1660-1800*, ed. Howard Anderson and John S. Shea (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), 320-321.
[98] Mylne, "Punctuation of Dialogue," 61. Her example: "grasped her hand and kissed it with *such* an ardor—Withdrew it with *such* an air of solemn respect—She had him then before her.—She could almost find it in her heart, altho' he had vexed her, to pity him."

ridiculousness of his characters as well, or at least that his readers were and are aware of this usage and have incorporated it into their interpretations of the novel. More uniformly serious, Sarah Fielding's dashes in *David Simple*, Barchas argues, represent "textual manifestations of a woman's coerced emotional silence," visually revealing moments in which social constraints limit a woman's emotional expression.[99] This contention is important to consider in light of the frequency with which Walpole's female characters struggle with speech (indicated by dashes), as in Matilda's speech above. Perhaps Walpole used dashes to poke fun at these popular authors, or perhaps he made use of the same tool they did for expressing fractured speech and thought and suppressed emotion.

Even setting aside the affective possibilities that other authors' influential dashes present, Walpole's own intratextual use of dashes is various and difficult to interpret. Napier writes that Walpole's tendency to interrupt his characters' speech (which he does with dashes) speeds the pace of the story, which she argues produces characters that lack a sense of interiority.[100] Yet, when Walpole uses dashes within a single character's speech, they suggest interiority in themselves, as if the speech is broken by hesitancy or emotion. Walpole utilizes both kinds of dashes—for internal and external disruption—in scenes that seem to be clearly dramatic, such as when Manfred confesses his secrets to Father Jerome, or when Manfred condemns Theodore to death over the protests of his father and his attendants. He even employs dashes in the novel's most celebrated scene, when Isabella flees Manfred in the underground tunnels, to convey her harassed thoughts. Yet alongside these apparently serious dashes are humorous ones like those of Diego and Jaquez's scene. Thus, Walpole own usage throughout the novel allows for more than one interpretation of

[99] Barchas, *Graphic Design*, 164.
[100] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 91-92.

the emotional function of dashes in Bianca and Matilda's scene and in the scenes I will examine next.

Returning to the excerpt with which I began this chapter, a scene in which Bianca interrupts Manfred and Frederic in a panic and eventually reveals Manfred's plotting to Frederic, we can now see more options for response than Williams's assertion that the quoted passage is conventionally overdramatic, sentimental, and overwritten, or Napier's confidence that the passage exemplifies the way scenes with servants "sink all into comedy."[101] Notably, when quoting, Napier preserves the run-together dialogue of the Oxford edition she uses, which could enhance the sense that ridiculousness bleeds into seriousness in the dialogue. Süner approaches this scene with more care, delineating multiple levels on which a single reader may respond, and he complements this differentiation of responses by also differentiating the speakers in the scene with quotation marks, despite using an Oxford edition that has none: "'Oh! my lord, my lord!' cried she, 'we are all undone! It is come again! It is come again!'—'What is come again?' cried Manfred amazed.—'Oh! the hand! the giant! the hand!'—Support me! I am terrified out of my senses,' cried Bianca."[102] Süner considers that though Bianca's expressions of horror and disarray seem humorous in the context of the novel, they are likely a realistic reaction to an unrealistic supernatural visitation.[103] Without any encouragement toward sympathy from the narrative, which could have shown Bianca's experience with the giant hand, "the reader is made to identify" with "the laughable Bianca" by imagining the reality of the situation, Süner argues, and this particular sympathetic response is "comically dissonant" with the

[101] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 84.
[102] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. W. S. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 102, qtd. in Süner, "Comic Tragedy," 21.
[103] For a more epistemological analysis of *Otranto*'s "real-unrealities," See Otto, "Disoriented."

genre expectations the text creates.[104] Of course, not all readers are "made" to feel this way, as Süner claims. To react in this way, readers would need to expect that the novel would maintain a tragic and exalted mood, register Bianca's fears and worries as "laughable" based on the dictates of genre, simultaneously choose to imagine themselves acting like Bianca in this unlikely scenario, and experience the resulting perceptions and emotions as humorous discord.

The impression that Bianca is laughable is worth further examination. In this scene Bianca, though reeling from a supernatural encounter, dwells on practical concerns: "I will not sleep in the castle to-night. Where shall I go? My things may come after me to-morrow.—Would I had been content to wed Francesco! This comes of ambition!"[105] The humor of this speech could result from the disjunction of the extraordinary and the ordinary, a conflict that Kiely and George Haggerty have both identified as a function of the novel's failed attempt to combine the fantastic with the realistic.[106] But in addition to the role that the intrusion of the ordinary into the extraordinary may play in making Bianca seem ridiculous, we should also consider that Bianca's speech here could represent the intrusion of the interiority of a low-ranking character into a story that focuses on the troubles of nobility. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik write that Bianca's concern for her trifling belongings and marital prospects "comically relativizes the larger themes" of the novel, as if worries about property and marital alliances are necessarily humorous when

[104] Süner, "Comic Tragedy," 24.
[105] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 102.
[106] Analyzing the scene in which Walpole follows a description of a painting miraculously stepping off the wall with a detailed account of the route it then takes, Kiely finds Walpole's "contradictory voices" jarring, while Haggerty finds them humorously awkward. Kiely, *Romantic Novel in England*, 33; George E. Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1989), 19.

they come from a servant rather than a noble.[107] Though Süner alleges that readers see their own potential terror in Bianca's response, he also patronizingly characterizes her speech as "delightful jabber," as if it contains no sense, and "wayward stream of consciousness," as if she has no control over her expression of her thoughts, even though her actual words show that she is logically planning her escape from danger and considering what led her to this disastrous juncture.[108] Süner even contends that the "superfluous" inclusion of a servant's thoughts causes the "debasement" and "degeneration" of the mood of the scene.[109] It is perhaps this perception of the classed superfluity of Bianca's interiority that influenced Williams to abridge Bianca's speech even while using it as an example of excessive writing for students. He cuts her "it is come again! it is come again!" after "we are all undone!" which is included in the edition he cites, even though the further frenzied repetition would help him present the passage as bad, melodramatic writing. Walpole himself (posing as a translator) mentions her "womanish terror and foibles" in the first preface, but modern scholars are usually more willing to read complexity in a character when the text allows it.[110] In their eagerness to use Bianca to make a point about the humor of the novel, scholars may sometimes reproduce a classist dismissal of a complex character.[111]

[107] Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, Introduction, *Gothic and the Comic Turn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5.
[108] Süner, "Comic Tragedy," 21.
[109] Süner, "Comic Tragedy," 22.
[110] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 6-7.
[111] In another instance of this critical behavior, Napier writes that when Bianca uses the word *particular* rather than *peculiar* upon encountering the hero Theodore outside the window, her "malapropism" "puncture[s] the mood of romantic mystery." Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 86. While Shakespeare popularized the misuse of words to make characters seem ridiculous, in this case, that is not necessarily the intention or effect. *Particular* could mean at this time, according to the OED, "So unusual as to excite attention; peculiar, odd, strange."

Though Bianca seems to strike most scholars as humorously naïve, some readers appear to have been better positioned to perceive her as being clever. In 1784, Ann Yearsley, a poet who worked as a milkwoman, wrote a poem in which the speaker, Bianca, addresses Walpole, her author. She begins by describing herself in the reductive terms Walpole allows her to be read, as a mere prattling woman, but soon avows, "We ladies our omnipotence conceal."[112] Madeleine Kahn reads Yearsley's Bianca as rejecting the way Walpole attempts to patronizingly write her off as comic relief, criticizing his underdevelopment of his other female characters, and asserting Yearsley's own underestimated artistic powers. Yearsley, Kahn argues, improves upon Walpole's novel by contributing a working-class woman's perspective, thereby "expanding Bianca's character into what seems to be her more natural role."[113] If we believe Dekker's aforementioned theory that Walpole meant his sentimental dedicatory poem to invite women's emotional collaboration, it would appear that some women were ready to flesh out the character sketches he provides. Today's amateur critics may also be better prepared than scholars to see Bianca as more than a dumb servant. For example, one reader attributes most of the novel's "realistic" elements to her, but unlike Süner, he describes her dialogue as "brilliant," an exception to the undefined characters who blur together in long paragraphs.[114] It is possible that readers like this one come to the text with fewer negative stereotypes about working-class women, which allows them to see the cleverness and insight that used to be apparent mostly to readers like Ann Yearsley, who shared Bianca's rank and gender. It is

[112] Ann Yearsley, "To the Honourable H—E W—E, on reading *The Castle of Otranto*," qtd. in Sabor, *Critical Heritage*, 78, 80.
[113] Madeleine Kahn, "'A by-stander often sees more of the game than those that play': Ann Yearsley Reads 'The Castle of Otranto,'" *The Bucknell Review* 42, no. 1 (1998): 73, ProQuest.
[114] Dave, review of *The Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole, Dave's Book Blog, December 22, 2014, http://davesbookblog-daja.blogspot.com/2014/12/the-castle-of-otranto-by-horace-walpole.html.

also possible that readers today who perceive Bianca as witty rather than jabbering are joining Yearsley in reading flattering qualities into the character, perhaps interpreting her as more of a canny servant type than her dialogue suggests.[115] "Tart-tongued" is a term used for Bianca in the novel's list of characters on GradeSaver, a site with literary summaries written by Harvard students. It is interesting to think about how students today may not even need to read the book in order to subscribe to a perception of Bianca that could be seen as reading into her character. In many of the affective interpretations in this section, we see how strongly and variously readers' expectations seem to influence their feelings about the novel, whether they find humor in having their generic expectations disappointed or reveal biases for or against certain character types.

Crying Shame

After considering the way that readers' perceptions of the formatting of dialogue, copious dashes, and realism may affect whether they experience the novel as comic, I can reflect more on the sentimental possibilities the text offers. Much like the way critics describe *Otranto*'s comedy in terms of the discomfort of unmet expectations, some readers discuss the novel's sentimentality in ways that demonstrate the awkwardness of trying to pin it down. Napier writes that the novel's humorous moments repeatedly undermine its sentimental scenes so that "a 'pure' response is forestalled," a claim that uses scare quotes to perform the writer's acknowledgment that "pure" response is a questionable concept

[115] The Castle of Otranto Character List, GradeSaver, http://www.gradesaver.com/the-castle-of-otranto/study-guide/character-list.

even while relying on that concept to make the argument.[116] On the other end of the spectrum of response, some readers have argued that the novel's sentiments are exemplary in their purity, though they may also cast doubt on that assertion. Eleanor Fenn, aka the eighteenth-century children's writer Mrs. Teachwell, recommends *Otranto* in 1784, the same year as Yearsley's poem shows sympathy with the novel's characters.[117] Unlike Yearsley, though, Fenn shows difficulty accommodating Bianca into her assessment of the novel's fine feeling. After quoting Matilda's previously mentioned speech about her parents as an example of "fine sentiments elegantly expressed," Fenn writes, "*Matilda* needs no foil; (else we might observe, that the inquisitive loquacious *Abigail* is contrasted finely.)"[118] She follows this statement by quoting dialogue in which Matilda ponders the cause of her mother's strange behavior with Bianca:

> [. . .] 'I am sure there is some fatal secret at bottom.—Nay, I know there is; in her agony of grief she dropped some words'—
> 'O! dear madam, what were they?'
> 'No!—if a parent lets fall a word, and wishes it recalled, it is not for a child to utter it; [. . .]'[119]

Fenn not only refers to Bianca by the wrong name but also places the mention of her in parenthesis, which seems indicative of how uncomfortably Bianca exists in a purely sentimental reading of the novel. Further, Fenn excerpts dialogue that does not place Matilda's authority or the serious tone in question, showing a limited picture of the dynamic between the two women. Mechanically, she not only chooses speech that features a sentimental use of dashes for Matilda's speech (showing internal conflict and strong

[116] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 85.
[117] For example, in addition to fleshing out Bianca, Yearsley's speaker praises Matilda and seems affected by the abovementioned scene in which she acknowledges the pain her parents cause her: "Matilda! ah, how soft thy yielding mind, / When hard obedience cleaves thy timid heart!" Yearsley, "Honourable," 79.
[118] Eleanor Fenn, "No. XXIV. Refined Morality," qtd. in Sabor, *Critical Heritage*, 82-83.
[119] Fenn, "Refined Morality," 83.

emotion) but also adds a dash (after "No!") that was not in the editions available at the time. Finally, Fenn separates the speech of Matilda and Bianca with quotation marks and line breaks, another formatting choice that didn't exist in the available editions, but which serves to make the two women appear more distinct from each other than they would otherwise. Fenn's solely sentimental reading of the novel relies on minimizing Bianca and making Bianca and Matilda into clearly delineated opposite types, while the original text allows for a reading that reveals close companionship and intermixes sentiment and comedy. It appears that any reader seeking a "pure" sympathetic response, or even a purely comic one, has to tune out the way Walpole's novel encourages mingling of ranks, lines of dialogue, and tones.

Of course, any claims about Walpole's sentimental or comic intentions need to contend with the issue of time. The age of Walpole's novel, and the additional distance added by his archaic use of language, can make what may have been meant to promote the mood of antique sentiment seem comic or merely empty, depending on the reader. Perhaps the most obvious stylistic cue for a sentimental response is Walpole's use of interjections, yet even this choice is more complicated that it originally appears. In the scene in which Bianca frantically describes her supernatural encounter to Manfred and Frederic, in which her speech could be read as realistically terrified or comically overdone, she uses the word "Oh!" five times in a single paragraph. Irma Taavitsainen, who studies linguistics, traces Walpole's use of interjections (like "Oh!/O!") to medieval romance, in which these exclamations helped indicate a change in speaker when the story was read aloud and

expressed strong emotion in a conventional way that indicated a peak in the plot.[120] Analyzing *Otranto*'s interjections, Taavitsainen notes that Walpole follows these outmoded conventions for orienting an audience within the story and intensifying emotion, with the consequence that they could be read as "stereotypical expressions of emotional states used as conventional commonplaces" —registering only as an imitation of the style of medieval romance without conveying emotion.[121] Though Walpole wrote *Otranto* in a time when it would be read silently, in his attempt to re-create some of the features of an older romance, he places interjections in keeping with rules established for audiences of another time, who would have needed more verbal cues to understand an oral tale. For readers who knew that Walpole wrote in the eighteenth century, this choice may come across as patronizing, as if Walpole thought his readers incapable of knowing what to feel without heavy-handed guidance. For readers struggling to determine who is speaking without quotation marks and line breaks, the turn-taking function of the interjections could be welcome, making the speech of characters like Bianca stand out more, or it could add more confusion, such as when Matilda interrupts her own speech about her parents with "—O that dear mother!" which could be read as Bianca's interruption. Visually, the multiple exclamation points that occur in scenes of emotional intensity could act as an instantaneous suggestion of comedy in the same way multiple dashes could.

The potential for humor in Walpole's sentimental interjections seems to rely on the paradoxical but popular assumption that affectively loaded form is empty form—that highly emphasized, conventionally expressed feeling is false. This belief was especially

[120] Irma Taavitsainen, "Emphatic Language and Romantic Prose: Changing Functions of Interjections in a Sociocultural Perspective," *European Journal of English Studies* 2, no. 2 (1998): 203-204, DOI: 10.1080/13825579808574413.
[121] Taavitsainen, "Emphatic Language," 207.

strong in the twentieth century,[122] but it originated earlier. Taavitsainen observes that William Cowper, writing two decades after *Otranto*'s publication, ridicules the use of pseudo-medieval interjections in poetry, and that Jane Austen's employs interjections to parody the gothic genre in *Northanger Abbey*.[123] It is unclear whether Walpole himself intended his interjections to seem ridiculous, but the way he distributes them among his characters allows for that interpretation. Walpole's interjections tend to be feminized, with the female characters using them in nearly every exchange, while male characters use them extremely rarely. The exclamation "Oh!/O!" is especially common with the female characters and male servants.[124] Walpole peppers the speech of these lower-status characters with the sort of interjections that could cast them as stereotypes from an old-fashioned romance, brand them as mere literary conventions with merely conventional expressions of emotion, or tinge them with ridiculous pretension, depending on the reader. Thus, Napier writes, "The scene of Matilda's death, despite (or perhaps because of) the agonized breast-beatings that precede it, is clearly burlesque in tone: '—oh!—She expired.'"[125] The fact that Napier believes that this single brief quote from a lengthy death scene can exemplify humor shows that even the presence of "Oh!" signals derision for some readers.

The scene to which Napier refers, at the climax of the novel, exemplifies the way Walpole's mechanics create ambiguity. Despite the seriousness of the situations, the

[122] Writing in 1998, Richard Davenport-Hines appears not to even consider that there is potential for serious feeling in *Otranto*'s interjections when he claims, "Walpole (who always enjoyed harlequinades) devised exclamatory dialogues which were consistently camp." Richard Davenport-Hines, *Gothic: 400 Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998), 140, qtd. in Horner and Zlosnik, Introduction, 4-5.
[123] Taavitsainen, "Emphatic Language," 212-213.
[124] The treatment of interjections varies among editions and even within the same edition. "Oh" is sometimes "O," which makes it appear more old-fashioned, and while it is usually followed by an exclamation point, some editions change it to a comma, toning down the emphatic effect.
[125] Napier, *Failure of Gothic*, 87.

frenzied pace of the scene could invite a humorous reading, as Theodore frantically tries to have Jerome marry him to Matilda before she dies, Jerome attempts to explain Theodore's lineage to Frederic in order to justify the marriage, Hippolita weeps over her daughter, and Matilda pleads for forgiveness for her murderous father and blames herself. These events, and more, inhabit one very long paragraph that extends across three pages of the Oxford edition, but they all seem to transpire in a matter of moments, each vying for the attention of the reader. The resulting chaos could increase the intensity of the emotion in the scene, or it could become the kind of excess that many readers find funny. Yet, it is debatable, at the very least, whether the scene is intentionally comic, since it represents love, forgiveness, and guilt in Matilda's last moments:

> Where is my father? Forgive him, dearest mother—forgive him my death; it was an error—Oh! I had forgotten—Dearest mother, I vowed never to see Theodore more—Perhaps that has drawn down this calamity—but it was not intentional—can you pardon me?—Oh! wound not my agonizing soul! said Hippolita; thou never couldst offend me.—Alas, she faints! Help! help!—I would say something more, said Matilda struggling, but it wonnot be—Isabella—Theodore—for my sake—oh!—She expired. Isabella and her women tore Hippolita from the corse; but Theodore threatened destruction to all who attempted to remove him from it.[126]

The scene, which reads to me as moving, combines many of the ambiguous features that I have examined previously: it features several different speakers in a long paragraph with dozens of dashes that sometimes signal a change of speaker and sometimes indicate a struggle for words. This could easily confuse and frustrate readers attempting to distinguish between characters, and it may make them more likely to give up on identifying each voice, thus lessening any emotional impact of the dialogue. The numerous dashes

[126] Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*, 112.

could read as comic or sentimental, and the interjections could read as emotional, emotionally void, or comically excessive.

Conclusion: Bad Ambiguity

We will never know for sure what Walpole intended his readers to feel about his more ambiguous scenes, or even if he had such intentions when writing them, but the fact that readers have carried on a lively and diverse discussion of Walpole's intentions and the novel's emotional style and effects is significant. It is a novel in which the emotional expectations of different genres produce drastically different effects, and none of these effects can simultaneously reflect positively on the author, the characters, and the writing. Reading for sentiment can make the writing look bad, and it can further minimize the characters who are not noble. Reading for unintentional comedy also makes the writing seem poor and makes the characters and their horrific situations laughable. Reading for parody makes Walpole seem duplicitous and contemptuous. If we were to find a compromise, it would be one that requires intensely engaged, nimble reading that can transition midsentence from pain to amusement, as Ledoux suggests Walpole himself did, but the level of attention and emotional involvement that such a reading style demands makes it unlikely that many would approach *Otranto*, a gothic novel, that way. The emotional demands of formula fiction are supposed to be straightforward, not to require constant recalibration. Scholars, who are well trained in close attention and different conventions, may be even more likely than other audiences to read the novel as a collection of successful or failed techniques and tropes. Compounding this, scholars might not even be

aware of the way they are being swayed by small but generically loaded details like dashes and exclamations.

Another option for reconciling the novel's emotional multiplicity would be approaching it with a reading style that holds open the ambiguity of each emotional scene, accepting simultaneous comedy and tragedy. This is not the same as camp, because even though camp affect is complex, and may even be sentimental in its appreciation for the past, the camp pose of the audience in relation to the art is one of amusement and ironic distance. Taken to an extreme, this is an attitude that overrides any concern for fictional or actual pain by focusing on the enjoyment of artificiality, exemplified by the fact that *Mommie Dearest*, a movie based on an autobiography about child abuse, could be named one of the campiest films of all time.[127] In contrast, an ambiguous reading of *Otranto* could acknowledge the way Matilda's dying exclamation seems humorously artificial while still allowing for a sympathetic response. It could mean being curious about but not beholden to the most defensible critical judgment or the author's intentions.

This is difficult because intention, despite being slippery, remains vital to response, and the level of sincerity behind the creation of melodramatic art like *Otranto* is especially difficult to gauge for audiences who have been influenced by the camp taste Sontag describes and the various iterations of appreciation for melodrama that followed. Sontag writes that only unintentional camp provokes the right kind of enjoyment, but soon after her essay, a wave of campy artists would popularize the aesthetic through queer films that intended to be humorously over-the-top while also making it unclear the extent to which

[127] Jose Gallegos, "25 of the Best Camp Films in Cinema History," Taste of Cinema, May 20, 2014, http://www.tasteofcinema.com/2014/25-of-the-best-camp-films-in-cinema-history/3/. *Mommie Dearest* is number five on the list.

they were mocking, for example, working-class white people, women, or queerness itself.[128] In his essay "The Melodramatic Moment," from 2003, Daniel Mendelsohn argues that with irony pervading culture, and pushed along by 9/11, tastes began to return to melodrama sincerely, with high-art filmmakers like Pedro Almodovar or Todd Haynes, big-budget films like "Moulin Rouge!," and television and literature using stylized excess with the intention of inviting not (or not only) laughter but also tears.[129] Yet in this same decade, the "so bad it's good" aesthetic rose in popularity, returning to an appreciation of Sontag's naïve camp, or art that fails in its grand intentions, but with a darker edge than Sontag describes, epitomized by the cult success of *The Room*, in which theater audiences encourage each other to ritualistically mock the portrayal of, among other things, cancer and suicide, spurred by their perception of the creator's self-importance.[130]

What all of this makes clear is that interpretations of tone are a social and cultural phenomenon. Even though readers are not experiencing *Otranto* in a theater, they are, at minimum, making calculations about Walpole's intentions that are social in nature. By finding the novel intentionally funny, unintentionally funny, frightening, or moving, they are responding not only to the text but also to their idea of the author. The social stakes intensify for critics, who make their tonal perception public and place it in conversation with other critics, who may judge them publicly. As Süner writes of scholars who describe

[128] For good overviews of these arguments, see Steven F. Dansky, "On the Persistence of Camp," *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* 20, no. 2 (2013): 15, ProQuest, and Gareth Cook, "The Dark Side of Camp," *Washington Monthly* 27, no. 9 (1995): 10-14, http://garethcook.net/the-dark-side-of-camp/.
[129] Daniel Mendelsohn, "The Melodramatic Moment," *New York Times Magazine* 23 (2003): 40-43.
[130] For fascinating studies on the audiences of *The Room*, see Matt Foy, "The Performance Cult of The Room: Embodied Audiencing and Movie Riffing as Shared Sense-making," *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research* 11, no. 1 (2012): 1-16, http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/kaleidoscope/vol11/iss1/2/, and Richard McCulloch, "'Most People Bring Their Own Spoons': *The Room*'s Participatory Audiences as Comedy Mediators," *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 8, no. 2 (2011): 189-218, http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/27339/1/McCulloch%20-%20The%20Room%20Participations%20article%20%28Final%20PDF%29.pdf.

Otranto as serious rather than comic, "I am afraid . . . that the implausibly high-minded interpretations, which work to divert from the irrepressible frivolity of Horace Walpole's work, ultimately run the risk of incurring the critical judgment of frivolity upon themselves."[131] Failing to get the joke, if there is one, puts a reader at risk of being seen as a dupe or a snob. But these social negotiations, which have existed over the whole course of *Otranto*'s reception, do not exist out of time. They are affected by cultural factors, such as the eighteenth-century popularity of the sentimental novel, which influenced readers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to perceive aspects of *Otranto* as successfully or unsuccessfully sentimental, or the camp aesthetic, which may have influenced twentieth-century scholars to perceive *Otranto*'s sentimentality and terror as humorously conventional. Even my own response ought to be historicized. Today's emerging scholars, like myself or Ledoux, wearied by decades of irony and raised in a critical atmosphere in which aesthetic failures can still merit scholarly investigation, may be more inclined to perceive sincere and effective feeling in the novel, to think about the cultural work the novel or its criticism performs, and to emphasize that perceptions and feelings about novels are complex and that it is largely because of this complexity that they have such expansive effects. Scholars have never had the kind of easy access to the responses of critics from other times that they have today through digitized books and periodicals, and the responses of many of today's scholars and online reviewers too are now almost instantly findable and searchable, even to those without the ability to use a university library's database. These technological changes afford critics the ability to read and assess hundreds of responses to a literary work in a relatively short period of time, and they

[131] Süner, "Comic Tragedy," 12.

welcome those of us who are curious about the variations in those responses to look more deeply into the circumstances that enable different attitudes toward literature.

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