The Eighteenth-Century British Romance Fiction of White Femininity and Its Neoliberal Aftermath

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To those who helped me onto the steps beyond the wall, whether those steps were at a state capitol or a sushi restaurant. To those from whom I continue to learn, whose lessons surpass the confines of the classroom and nourish from river to sea.

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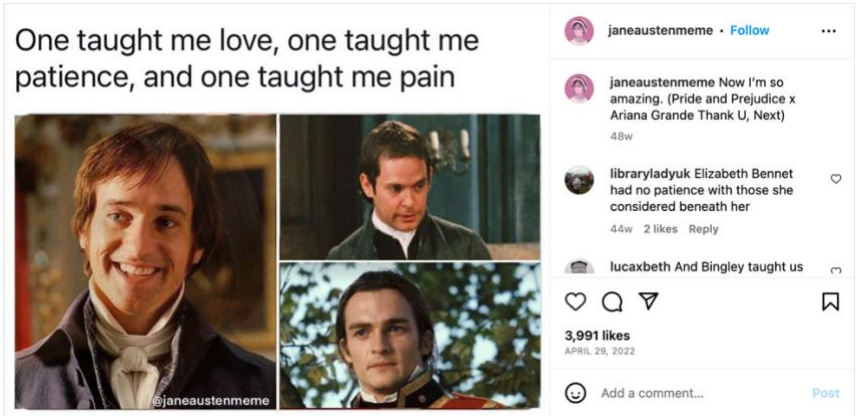

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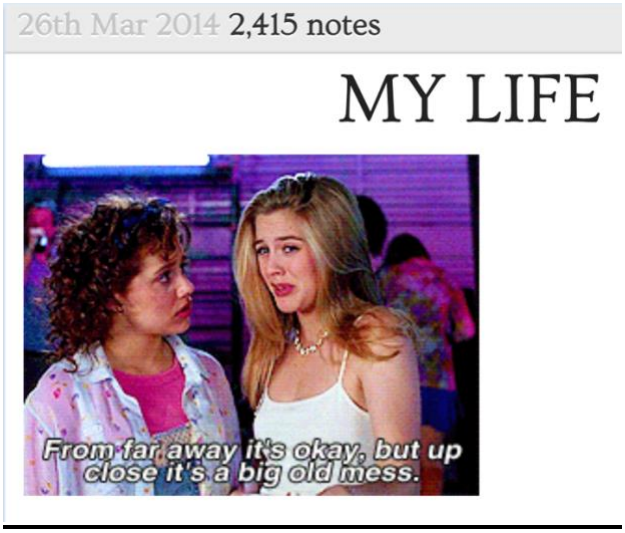

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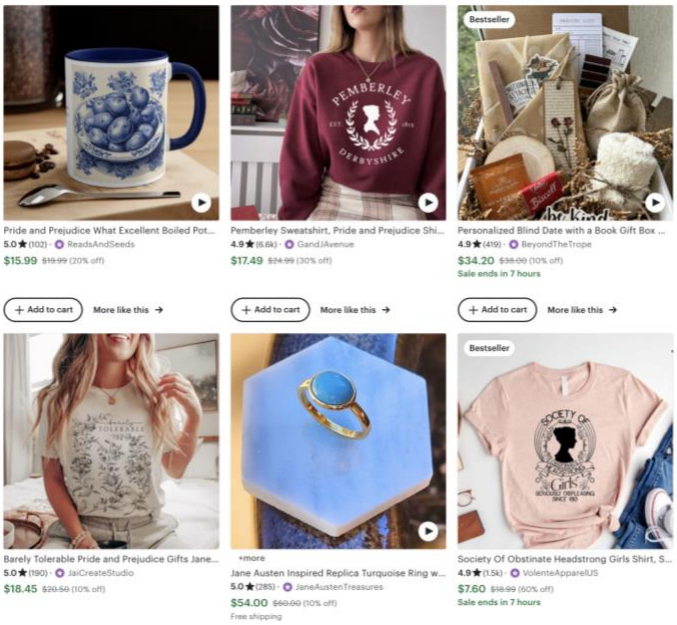

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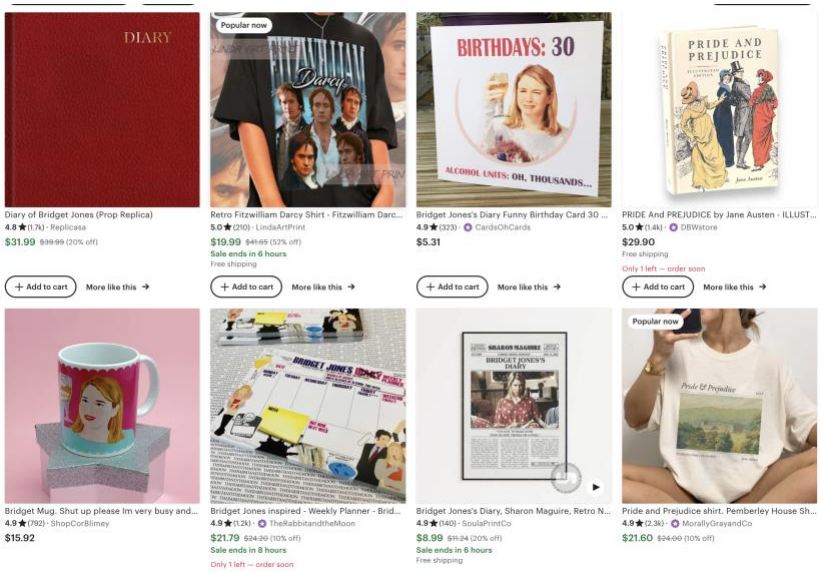

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Introduction: A Memetic Digression

The romance of Jane Austen and memes

A typical romance fiction of the early eighteenth-century reads as though its young characters are tasked with navigating mazes of sensuality. Along the way, the map of reason is lost. Erotic feelings become the only guide across ravines of rakes, canyons of coincidence, sandpits of seduction, and dens of digression. On the other side of the maze is, the heroine and the reader hope, a familial comfort and stability that was once lost but is restored through matrimony. Depending, however, on the designer of the maze, its heroines may succumb to their desires. Though the heroines and the layout of their mazes change dramatically over the course of the long eighteenth-century, it is the general argument of this study that romance fictions unfold in the same general orientation: towards an ideal of white femininity, which wields contemporary philosophical understandings of narrative and feeling within the developing ideological bounds of racial capitalism. Further complicating the simple promise of a happily ever after, the romanticization of white femininity continues to this day in neoliberal reconceptualizations of the eighteenth-century narrative.

This labyrinthian design is also the design of this dissertation, which rambles across eighteenth-century British romances with an initial digression and eventual return to twenty-first century media culture. This structure aims to generate parallels between feminized media across historical eras. The intention with this structure is not only to discover continuities from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first, but also to offer novel methodological pathways into the past. Through this design, I reckon with the whiteness of neoliberal womanhood and romance through an affective literary history of whiteness in eighteenth-century Britain, when the romance novel and women's culture emerged alongside racial capitalism.

In 2021, the phrase "Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss" floated across the internet until it reached the apex of the cultural zeitgeist. This phrase circulated culturally as a meme, a digital parcel of media identifiable through its viral, imitative, and dissonant properties. Memes are created through individual people latching onto digital entities and proliferating those entities in edited forms. Memeification refers to the formation of a digital meme and in some ways is a media-specific term for "appropriation." A meme is ephemeral in that memes are intended to propagate and alter continually in response to cultural discourses and individual subjectivities. A meme produces an affective intensity through juxtaposition, often irony. This intensity then dissipates. Because of their form, memes are dependent on context and are only effective when they reach a specific alignment. As affective units, they register socio-cultural resonance. Memes are moments of reckoning: do you recognize the humor? Do you recognize yourself?

Parodying mainstream women's culture, "Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss" mocks the inspirational phrase "Live, Laugh, Love." "Live, Laugh, Love" became a staple of kitschy home décor in the 2000s. Widely available at discount chain stores, the phrase accrued a normative value associated with white American middle-class domesticity. "Live, Laugh, Love" became synonymous with a strain of white culture unwilling to recognize the privileges of whiteness. With its cursive font and farmhouse aesthetic, "Live, Laugh, Love" specifically emblematized a certain strain of white femininity (see Figure 1). "Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss" upends the inspirational quote's cozy affect and mocks its iteration of whiteness. Originating as a tweet, the phrase "Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss" became an image macro meme. Digitally imposed on domestic scenes and written in cursive font, the phrase even more obviously lampooned "Live, Laugh, Love." In the preceding years, each term in "Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss" had entered the neoliberal cultural zeitgeist with much fanfare, only to quickly lose their potency due to

criticisms and overuse.[1] Derived from Patrick Hamilton's play *Gas Light* (1938) and made famous through George Cukor's 1944 film adaptation, the term gaslight has become synonymous with a process of emotional and epistemological manipulation that erodes a victim's mental state. Gatekeeping refers to the exclusionary tactic of marginalized identities embedded within western hegemony. The girlboss is another form of white femininity generated in the 2010s that aspires to corporate rather than domestic success; in this process, girlbossing re-produces racial capitalism through postfeminist ideology. Formerly signaling a chic feminist overtake of patriarchal capitalism, girlboss had by then accrued the very toxicity it had promised to evade. Through the liberatory rhetoric of post-feminism, the girlboss had become associated with unhealthy and even abusive work environments that prioritized productivity within a white supremacist ideology. By the summer of 2021, numerous famed girlbosses had fallen from grace. Takedowns from journalists and employees overlapped in a common trajectory where these girlbosses gaslighted employees and gatekept socio-economic power. Hence, "Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss."

In appropriating the "Live, Laugh, Love" form, the "Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss" phrase deems the original a symbol of Karen whiteness. But this appropriation is also a conflation that criticizes girlbossing for its white femininity. With the tide having turned against girlbosses, many who previously aspired to this persona now chose to repudiate it. For some, the phrase only mocks "Live, Laugh, Love." For other, the phrase mocks both the "Live, Laugh, Love" and the girlboss iterations of white femininity—and wielding this phrase critiques those who read only the first layer of criticism. The multiple satirical potentials of "Gaslight,

[1] Alex Abad-Santos, "Girlboss Ended Not with a Bang, but a Meme," Vox, June 7, 2021, https://www.vox.com/22466574/gaslight-gatekeep-girlboss-meaning.

Gatekeep, Girlboss" and the manner in which it captures a highly specific cultural moment is typical of a meme.

This layering is also reminiscent of Austen's sharp satire. Despite Austen's global fanbase, her canon is read in various ways. For some, Austen is a satirical master; for others, Austen provides an escape into a simpler world. My project focuses on this latter reading of Austen as a source of comfort. Regardless of how Austen is read now, her voice remains current. Austen content continues to suffuse mainstream cultural centuries after her original works were published. In 2022, the streaming platform Netflix continued the endless trend of updating Austen with their adaptation of *Persuasion*. "Jane Austen's *Persuasion* Meets the Girlboss Era," read the headline of Helen Lewis's 2022 article on Netflix's adaptation of Austen's 1816 novel.[2] With girlboss having already fallen out of favor and been memeified, this connection is not a positive one; nor, is Lewis's review of *Persuasion.* Lewis, like others, panned the film for its use of modern dialogue, amongst other reasons.

In 2022, Austen already had a comfortable place in the meme landscape at the time, with countless memes and meme accounts having trafficked in Austenian content for years. At the time of writing, the Instagram account @janeaustenmeme has nearly 30,000 followers. One posted meme consists of a video featuring a cat squinting at a wine glass as disco lights flash, with overlaid text reading, "Actual footage of Caroline Bingley at Elizabeth & Darcy's wedding reception."[3] Another juxtaposes images of Mr. Darcy, Mr. Collins, and Captain Wickham from the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* with lyrics from Ariana Grande's "7 Rings" that read "One taught

[2] Helen Lewis, "Jane Austen's 'Persuasion' Meets the Girlboss Era," The Atlantic, July 13, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/07/persuasion-jane-austen-meets-girlboss-era/670498/.
[3] @janeaustenmeme, *Congratssssss*, October 10, 2021, Instagram, October 10, 2021, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/janeaustenmeme/.

me love, one taught me patience, and one taught me pain."[4] A quick scroll on SparkNotes' Twitter turns up a screenshot from the popular *Brooklyn 99* show with the text readjusted; the caption reads: "harriet when emma assumes she's in love with frank churchill now;" the overlaid text on the image of the stoic police captain and his dog is edited to read: "I could not have been more clearly talking about mr. knightley."[5] These memes uphold aspects familiar to those who only know Austen through scholarly editions and have no clue who Ariana Grande is. Romance and wit compound in these memes, within spheres of popular culture that *feel* as niche as Austen's domestic spaces. These memes generate a sense of intimacy that is an extension of the intimacy experienced in a pleasurable reading of Austen's canon. And yet, these memes do not present the same exact Austen who continues to fill syllabi. Who is this memeified Austen?

Anne Kanai, in *Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture*, examines a similar corpus of memes that speak to a wide audience of 20-something women. Kanai focuses on a Tumblr blog from the mid-2010s called "What Should We Call Me" (WSWCM). The blog originated as a digital epistolary exchange between two friends. Their public letters took the memetic form of short-looped videos (GIFs) superimposed with text. "When someone says they really like their job" is written above a GIF of a shocked Sarah Jessica Parker as Carrie from *Sex and the City*.[6] "My Life" is attached to a GIF of Alicia Silverstone as Claire Horowitz from *Clueless* saying "From far away it's okay, but up close it's a big old mess."[7] Kanai reads the relatability of these memes as "an affective relation produced through labor that reflects a desirable notion of

[4] @janeaustenmeme, *Now I'm so Amazing.*, April 29, 2022, Instagram, April 29, 2022, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/janeaustenmeme/.
[5] @SparkNotes, "Harriet When Emma Assumes She's in Love with Frank Churchill Now Https://T.Co/3UnCoO7o1n," Tweet, *Twitter*, February 22, 2023, https://twitter.com/SparkNotes/status/1628442940098895873.
[6] whatshouldwecallme, "When Someone Says They Really like Their Job," Tumblr, *Tumblr* (blog), accessed March 13, 2024, https://whatshouldwecallme.tumblr.com/post/66095298080/when-someone-says-they-really-like-their-job.
[7] whatshouldwecallme, "My Life," Tumblr, *Tumblr* (blog), accessed March 13, 2024, https://whatshouldwecallme.tumblr.com/post/80819814479/my-life.

common experience to an unknown audience."[8] The commonality that these memes enforce through their structuring of intimacy as relatability is that of a "desirable sameness" constituted within "white, middle-class standards of femininity."[9] Such memes and their consumers are often described as "normie." This term judges widespread popularity as indicative of an unsophisticated mind, and the popular content as superficial. A "normie" person sees only the first layer of "Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss" Through WSWCM's propagation of normie sameness across individual users, Kanai reads the Tumblr blog as a digital intimate public.

Lauren Berlant coined the term "intimate public" as part of their series on public feeling in America to describe how mass culture generates belonging through affect. In *The Female Complaint*, Berlant outlines the idea of intimate publics as a way of describing "women's culture"—an amorphous entity Berlant describes as the locus of femininity in American culture since the nineteenth century. An intimate public emerges through contemporary socio-historical affects, or, to use Raymond Williams's term, structures of feeling.[10] Intimate publics interpellate individuals through specific affective and aesthetic content disseminated through mass media. Berlant writes, "an intimate public is a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general, [and] what's salient for its consumers is that it is a place of recognition and reflection."[11] Intimate publics broker personal selfhood through public media. With its language of consumers and consumption, the model of intimate publics theorizes belonging according to the logic of capitalism. Citizenship to an intimate public requires accumulation. This accumulation is endless, keeping citizens in a constant state of material and affective striving.

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[8] Akane Kanai, *Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture: Managing Affect, Intimacy and Value* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 4.
[9] Kanai, 6, 19.
[10] Raymond L. Williams, "Structures of Feeling," in *Marxism and Literature*, repr, Marxist Introductions (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 128–35.
[11] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), viii.

Conventional women's culture is an intimate public because its community is formed through shared attachments to material espousing heteronormative ideologies; women's culture is differentiated from other intimate publics because it filtered through the perspective of women's romantic relationships. Women's culture is consequently, as Berlant writes, "a love affair with conventionality."[12] This translates to a love affair with the familiar. Berlant writes, "What makes a public sphere intimate is an expectation that the consumers of its particular stuff *already* share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience."[13] Cultural and emotional alignment determine a person's access to citizenship within women's culture, and thus access to the larger heteronormative American culture. This continual emphasis on belonging through feeling and consumption divorces citizenship from political activity. *Feeling* political rather than *being* political suffices. Women's culture is "juxtapolitical" insofar as it thrives "in *proximity* to the political."[14] This murky political orientation of women's culture becomes the affect of ambivalence: a simultaneous yearning and refutation of normativity and romantic fantasies. This affective spectrum offers the ability to luxuriate in the anxiety of individual suffering and choice, such that degrees of oppression are elided and community continually returns to normative citizenry. Generated through consumption under racial capitalism, this normative—or normie—citizenry subscribes to racial hierarchism.

Kanai, building on Berlant, describes the Tumblr blog WSWCM as generating "as a digital intimate public, a digital space operating on a fantasy of fitting into a feminine generality, offering a sense of ongoing attachment through the expression of emotional likeness."[15] Kanai

[12] Berlant, 2.
[13] Berlant, viii.
[14] Berlant, x.
[15] Kanai, *Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture*, 5.

analyzes how WSWCM enables "a sense of place within society" within contemporary rhetoric.[16] Kanai's argument applies to the broader intimate public of women's culture, to which WSWCM's intimate public belongs. As this delineation implies, intimate publics can function like nesting dolls, with an umbrella intimate public organizing subcommunities centered around specific media but with shared ideologies. For example, a superfan of WSWCM memes and a superfan of a girlboss company like Glossier could both belong to women's culture *and* their more specific intimate publics. Kanai writes that trafficking in women's culture "means being able to lay claim to experience deemed 'general', and tether this claim to individual value in ways that tend to reinstate the value of white, middle class femininity."[17] Kanai, and other scholars of digital culture, projects historical readings of women's culture into the twenty-first century. In so doing, the new media of digital culture joins the lineage of women's culture in literature and film that Berlant and others read from the nineteenth century onwards.

While eighteenth-century scholars have attended to women's culture,[18] I conjoin this history into a longer genealogy of Anglo-American feminine belonging within racial capitalism. I argue that eighteenth-century British romance novels are an overlooked origin point of women's culture; in their personal consumption and paratextual circulation as commodities, stories from Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* (1725) to Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) assist in codifying citizenship for feminine individuals within the terms of racial capitalism. This

[16] Kanai, 12.
[17] Kanai, 19.
[18] The theater, in particular, is another locus for the evolution of women's culture. Ros Ballaster, Gillian Russell, and Brett Wilson are three such scholars whose analyses of women's cultural involvement through the stage and the theater as a communal medium relate to the conversation of women's culture. Brett D. Wilson, *A Race of Female Patriots: Women and Public Spirit on the British Stage, 1688-1745*, Transits: Literature, Thought & Culture, 1650-1850 (Lewisburg [Pa.]: Bucknell University Press, co-published with The Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Group, 2012); Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London*, Cambridge Studies in Romanticism 70 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Ros Ballaster, *Fictions of Presence: Theatre and Novel in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Boydell & Brewer, 2020), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv105bbxx.

codification takes the form of white femininity, an affective and aesthetic ideal that adheres to racial capitalism. A core aspect of racial capitalism is its hierarchization of identities, wherein race, gender, and class conspire to elevate economically-secure straight white cis men above other identities. White women, especially from the middle and upper classes, maintain their secondary position in this socio-cultural hierarchy through their white femininity. The terms of white femininity are constantly adapting, following the interests of racial capitalism and the continual need to stifle potential resistance. My genealogy explores these shifts through considering media from two pivotal periods of racial capitalism: its emergence in the eighteenth-century and its seeming inescapability in the neoliberal era. The capitalist realism of our era is dependent on the formal and informal constructions of citizenship in the eighteenth century.

I schematize white femininity along eighteenth-century terms of passivity and sympathy and argue that while the contemporary meanings of these terms shift, white femininity remains wedded to passivity and sympathy in neoliberalism; white womanhood's affiliation with passivity and sympathy renders the white woman as a victim who depends upon the mechanics of racial capitalism for protection. A woman of any background who models her identity on white femininity, as learned through normative romance media in fiction, film, TV, and the internet, secures her position within white supremacy. I shorthand this interpellation through women's culture and the ongoing residue of eighteenth-century romances in women's culture as the "romance mode." While the romance *form* refers to media, the romance mode describes the consumer's assimilation into Anglo-American hegemony . The romance form is both a set of literary conventions and an ideological technology that interpellates individuals into the romance mode. The romance mode seeps beyond romance books and movies and into daily life. Taking a

Hot Girl Walk? That's the romance mode. Girl Dinner? The romance mode. Catch-ups between friends with paralleling identities that revolve around dating? Could be the romance mode.

A woman meets a man who piques her curiosity. The man is also interested, and the two begin a sexual affair. The man loses interest. He disappears without a word. Then he reappears and entices the woman into resuming their affair. Until he disappears one final time. A different man and woman meet, and this time neither is curious about the other. They would rather not speak. But circumstances demand otherwise, and the two are thrown into proximity. Once enemies, they become lovers. These are the stories of rakes and heroes, and the women who endure them. The disappearing rake takes center stage in *Fantomina* (1725) and *Ghosts* (2020)—two romances haunted with unrequited love. Both fictions tackle "ghosting" from the perspective of single women; a term from the 2010s, ghosting is explicitly referenced in Dolly Alderton's *Ghosts*. Writing in 1725, Eliza Haywood was not familiar with the concept of ghosting; but her narrative exploration of gender politics reaches across the centuries. Haywood's anonymous young woman concocts new disguises to retain the sexual interest of Beaupleasir. In 2020, Alderton's Nina imprints her own narrative onto her capricious lover Max. Fantomina first sees Beaupleasir at the theater, and Nina finds Max on a dating app. This wide cultural berth is bridged in the fictions' shared portrayal of womanhood through sexual and romantic experiences that broker fantasy and reality.

The romance form, one origin of which may be traced to amatory fiction, traverses between convention and innovation to generate its erotic bildungsroman for its protagonists and readers. Scholarly consensus situates amatory fiction as falling temporally between chivalric and domestic genres of romance, and largely attributes the genre to three writers: Aphra Behn and her 1680s fictions; Delarivier Manley's fictions in the 1710s to 1720s; and Eliza Haywood's

prolific writings of the 1720s and 1730s.[19] In addition to their original writings, these women authored plays, wrote periodicals, and translated works from French.[20] Along with other authors such as Jane Barker, Penelope Aubin, and Mary Davys, these women cemented this literary genre through amalgamating British and French court traditions, contemporary theatre, and political texts.

Building upon the legacy of amatory fiction, the romance form redeploys genre conventions and cultural normativity towards erotic satisfaction that is largely unachievable in the everyday. In this mediation, romance provides a reprieve from everyday mundanities. It offers escapism, a paradoxical feeling of disembodied embodiment. In his study of eighteenth-century romances, Scott Black defines romances similarly, writing that romance "is always already organized around the historical problem of the meeting of old forms and new worlds, and indeed often the intrusion of old forms into new worlds."[21] Black speaks specifically to romance fictions, and separates them from the history of the novel. He writes that "unlike the novel, which adapts old forms for new projects, romance tends to use old form for both new and old purposes, adapting their structures but also adopting their force."[22] This mélange of form and force develops the playful escapism of romance: the cozy comfort of re-reading Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's meeting in *Pride and Prejudice*, or the burst of joy when Max reappears on Nina's doorstep in *Ghosts*. Romance generates a liminal space within which narrative play abounds,

[19] Patrick Spedding's bibliography of Haywood is the only lengthy bibliographic study of these authors. Having written more than two dozen fictions in the 1720s, Haywood is by far the most prolific author of the amatory genre. Patrick Spedding, *A Bibliography of Eliza Haywood* (London ; Brookfied, Vt: Pickering & Chatto, 2004).
[20] Scholarship on these author's translated works is an entirely separate subfield of amatory studies that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this project. Kate Williams, "Passion in Translation: Translation and the Development of the Novel in Early-Eighteenth Century England," in *Remapping the Rise of the European Novel*, ed. Jenny Mander (Voltaire Foundation, 2007), 157–69.
[21] Scott Black, *Without the Novel: Romance and the History of Prose Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 9.
[22] Black, 9.

within and outside of the novel. Black writes, "The cultural 'work' of romance is to open, and reopen, such transitional spaces in the ordinary world and in history."[23] Romance is a facilitator of cultural shifts, a way of articulating belonging and relationality within contemporary terms. Romance can, as in the case of Penelope Aubin's violently chaste 1720s fictions, reaffirm old mores. Romance can also, as in the case of *Fantomina* and *Ghosts*, develop relationality against normative expectations. Fantomina pursues sex outside of marriage; Nina begins and ends her narrative happily single.

Beginning with amatory fiction, I assert that new genres of the romance form emerge to narrativize ideological change, in both rebellious and conservative ways. The radical potential of these genres is perpetually foreclosed because of the romance form, structured through racial capitalism, coalesces dissension into the expectations of white femininity. Whereas Berlant explores the normative position once fully constructed, I theorize the trajectory of intimate publics as beginning in subversion. As an adaptive intimate public that offers an escape before reaffirming one's place in racial capitalism, the romance form can traffic readers into the romance mode. "I was reminded of how annoyingly delicious these patronizing traditions of heteronormativity could be," writes Dolly Alderton in *Ghosts*. Romances mediate personal and communal desires, both hegemonic and destabilizing. The appeal of romance is this paradox, and the affective comfort this paradox provides: living through the romance mode, one can, through romance's irony, be both within and against the system; an agent of change and a citizen protected under cultural norms. The romance form encourages writing oneself into a romance narrative, turning towards capitalist individualism in the process.

[23] Black, 16.

I read how the romance form develops in the eighteenth century and transposes into the neoliberal era through tracing formal and affective resonances across romance forms. Amatory fiction, sentimental romances, and domestic fictions make up my eighteenth-century genres; chick lit and middlebrow fiction represent the neoliberal era. Invested in understanding the juxtapolitical ambivalence of women's culture, I prioritize amatory fiction and authors such as Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood, who blend state and gender politics through an appropriation of extant romance forms, namely chivalric and French romances. Like these amatory authors, contemporaneous philosophers delved into the passions—eighteenth-century language for what we now describe alternately as emotions and affect. Building from early modern conceptions of civic virtue, thinkers like Anthony Ashley-Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury explored feelings as a pathway to civic virtue. Engaging with politics and feelings, amatory writers politicized feelings in a novel way through romance narratives that featured women's erotic desire. This politicization continued throughout the century as discourses of sympathy and sentimentality became popular. Indeed, such language owes much to amatory fiction, and the conceit of sympathy generally becomes a core component of the century's romance form. I explore the more explicit constitution of sympathy in the mid-century sentimental romance novel through the novel's construction of interiority, which Austen heightens in her domestic fiction through her ironic complexities.

Austen's cultural prominence brings us to the 1990s, when Austenmania emerged and helped inaugurate the postfeminist era of the romance mode. The modern adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and novels like *Ghosts* illustrate how sympathy and passivity remain central to the romance form and its conception of white femininity. Neoliberal conceits, however, change the

affective dynamics of white femininity, such that passivity moves further towards political ambivalence and sympathy increasingly depends on nostalgia and individualism.

Because this project is an affective genealogical study of romance's narrativization of white femininity, the historical evolution of romances is assumed rather than analyzed, and the history of the novel in contradistinction to the history of romances is not a central conversation in this project. Nonetheless, the convoluted use of "novel" and "romance" alongside "form" and "genre" in both contemporary and modern parlance requires clarification. Romance defies neat categorization, exemplified in eighteenth-century prologues offering varied definitions of novel and romance and decades of scholarship attempting the same. Broadly speaking, British romance tales of classical and chivalric love absorb French romance fictions from the late seventeenth-century alongside myriad other influences to produce a glut of fictional narratives; the breadth of these narratives seemingly develop into the novel form *and* maintain a distinct strain of romance, categorized through stylistic and formal conventions. This distinction is nebulous, especially at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Later historical shifts in the marketplace and literary history cleave novel and romance, producing the denigrated "romance genre" of bookshop categorizations. The transhistorical nature of this study means I traverse across various understandings of "romance," beginning with Old Romances and culminating with modern love stories. For all of these narratives, romantic desire and the expectation of a culturally sanctioned union is the foundation of the narrative. Narrative tension arises from conflict between contemporary expectations of romantic unions and the embodied experience of desire.
This study is concerned with the affective depictions of this tension within eighteenth-century romances and neoliberal romances. I categorize eighteenth-century romance fictions as belonging to genres within the romance form. I use genre to isolate structures of feeling; I apply

genre to categorize historical trends in popular renderings of the romance form. Genre, in this study, thus denotes the representation of a form within a socio-cultural moment; genre is the response and result of specific structures of feeling. The literary history of romance fictions serves mostly to underscore the broad cultural dissemination of romance. This dissemination moves romance tales beyond the romance form and into the romance mode: a cultural narrative that genders socio-cultural belonging within the terms of racial capitalism.

The vibes of white women's tears

In 2017, meme creator @goldnosering shared a meme on Instagram reading, "When your class starts talking about privilege and oppression and one white woman inevitably starts crying" above an image of a white family holding signs that @goldnosering edited to read "IT'S NOT THAT DEEP" (Figure 5). The caption of this Instagram post reads in part: "i guess you can stop class discussion to tell everyone how you're sorry for growing up with both parents, in a large house, with no large financial strains, always clothed and fed, no health problems[...]" Through her meme, @goldnosering suggests that having privilege does not warrant such an emotional reaction; this reaction seemingly evinces a virtuous empathy with marginalized identities but actually does little more than take space away from those who are already afforded little space. @goldnosering's meme captures the phenomenon of white women's tears, wherein a privileged individual—often but not always a white woman—showcases emotional discomfort within a discussion of oppression against marginalized identities, such that the experiences of the oppressed are overshadowed. In so doing, white women's tears assert the supremacy of whiteness through weaponizing tears. What is the origin of white women's tears?

White feminism broadly describes a politics of gendered white supremacy that is deeply embedded in Anglo-American culture, with white women's tears acting as a metonym for the emotive political stance. Koa Beck, in *White Feminism*, writes, "Since the beginning of organized women's rights in the United States, white feminism has lurked, adapted, and endured—rebranding and reincarnating alongside the revolution of its day."[24] White feminism maintains a complicity with whiteness through its affective structure and rhetoric of individualism that implicitly prioritize a racialized gender binary. "Supporters of white feminism want to reconcile their feminism with the mythology that they are still special, better, 'work harder,' and are therefore entitled to the roles that any combination of race, class privilege, conventional femininity, and/or a cis gender have landed them."[25] Whiteness, as Beck elucidates, is not a biological difference but a socio-cultural construct within the larger ideological structure of white supremacy. Sara Ahmed, in "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," describes whiteness as an affective orientation that has accumulated cultural weight. "Whiteness could be described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space."[26] Whiteness, which is "an effect of racialization," has an affective corporeality.[27] Nonetheless, whiteness reads as invisible—not because it is innately harmless but because it occupies the totality of space. Whiteness is a proximity to orientations that, though inheritable, people of any race, gender, class, or ethnicity can reject or embrace.[28] If whiteness is the lens of our orientations, then it is all we can see. "When you speak of whiteness," Ahmed

[24] Koa Beck, *White Feminism: From the Suffragettes to Influencers and Who They Leave Behind* (New York: Atria Books, 2021), 10.
[25] Beck, xviii.
[26] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (August 2007): 150, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139.
[27] Ahmed, 150.
[28] Ahmed, 155.

writes in *Living a Feminist Life*, "it can then seem like you are making something from nothing."[29] But whiteness comes from somewhere.

Critical race scholars locate the genesis of whiteness before the eighteenth century,[30] with many viewing the eighteenth century as a significant moment in which whiteness is naturalized through Enlightenment epistemologies. Charles Mills' *The Racial Contract* famously argues that social contract theory and the formation of modern democratic states substantiated whiteness as a political reality.[31] Mills writes in *Antiblackness* that in the eighteenth century, "whiteness becomes the identity of both enlightenment and of the human bearers of enlightenment. Whiteness is light; whiteness is all-encompassing; whiteness is the universal; whiteness is Euro-illumination."[32] Despite such arguments, studies attending to how whiteness and femininity interact in the period are relatively few, especially regarding the politicization of gender within the framework of whiteness.

Genealogies of white feminism extend back only to the suffragette era.[33] Kyla Schuller, in *The Trouble with White Women*, writes, "If women were the real architects of civilization, then tears and the sentimental fiction and poetry that elicited them were their building blocks."[34] Schuller refers to nineteenth-century culture and works like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's*

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[29] Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 146.

[30] For recent early modern critical race theory, see Margo Hendricks, *Race and Romance: Coloring the Past* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, ACMRS Press, 2022); Carol Mejia LaPerle, ed., *Race and Affect in Early Modern English Literature* (ACMRS Press, 2022), https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/R/bo122973529.html; Jennifer L. Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021); Simon Newman, *Freedom Seekers: Escaping from Slavery in Restoration London* (University of London, 2022), https://doi.org/10.14296/202202.9781912702947.

[31] Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Cornell University Press, 2014), https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801471353.

[32] Charles W. Mills, *The Illumination of Blackness*, ed. Moon-Kie Jung and João H. Costa Vargas (Duke University Press, 2021), 17, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1grbbwr.

[33] Schuller, Beck, Hamad, and Phipps share this genealogical starting point.

[34] Kyla Schuller, *The Trouble with White Women: A Counterhistory of Feminism*, First edition (New York: Bold Type Books, 2021), 79.

Cabin as enabling the ongoing cult of white femininity that allows for the murder of Emmett Till or the harassment of Christian Cooper while birdwatching.[35] The nineteenth-century American cult of sentimentality that Schuller and others observe as critically informing white feminism is itself genealogically indebted to eighteenth-century British literature, including romance fictions. White feminism falsely sees gender oppression as the sole socio-cultural inequality. Working within the hierarchies of racial capitalism, white feminism weaponizes white femininity to whiteness and misogyny to incite the sympathy of those with greater the socio-cultural power (white men) who in turn act to protect white feminists by further oppressing subaltern populations. Enlightenment-era romance fictions contribute to white feminism through narrativizing their heroines within racializing and gendering rhetoric of victimhood, sympathy, narrative self-fashioning, and passivity.

This project is a study of whiteness that critiques western hegemony from within and at a critical point of formation. I am interested in articulating the invisibility of white supremacy without engaging in language that abjects non-whiteness as Other. Consequently, I read texts from white authors with white heroines until I arrive at *Queenie* in my last chapter to consider the re-formulation of white femininity. I focus on describing the affective experience of white femininity, which means that affect theory undergirds my analysis. I specifically build upon Brian Massumi's affective materialism. In *Parables of the Virtual*, Massumi presents an affective methodology by way of critiquing ideological theory that isolates systems and bodies into a positional model. "Ideological accounts of subject formation emphasizes systemic structures,"

[35] For more on digital media and race, see Apryl Williams, "Black Memes Matter: #LivingWhileBlack With Becky and Karen," *Social Media + Society* 6, no. 4 (October 2020): 205630512098104, https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120981047.

Massumi writes, demurring from the Althusserian approach to ideology.[36] Massumi explicates how such perspectives encode cultural understandings along a static grid. "The grid was conceived as an oppositional framework of culturally constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on."[37] Such conceptualizing of ideology produces a telos of binaries. The romance form generates ideals of white femininity demarcated by a "point" of no return for a woman who exceeds the bounds of femininity. The romance form props up the Madonna/whore dichotomy, which colors the affective presentation of how women generate narrative action: either in inconspicuous and passive or obtrusive and active terms.

Generally speaking, affect precedes articulation whereas emotion is socially articulable. Massumi writes,

> An emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing, of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning.[38]

Affect lacks the linguistic containment evident in Massumi's description of emotion. Accordingly, affect escapes a neat definition and analytical process. Massumi describes affect as a virtual occurrence. By virtual, Massumi means "[s]omething that happens too quickly to have happened."[39] This produces "a lived paradox." This description parallels the paradoxical nature of the romance form, which blends old and new with escapism and reality. The virtuality of

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[36] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 2.
[37] Massumi, 2.
[38] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 28.
[39] Massumi, 30.

affect is likewise replicated through intimate publics centered around media like literature or social media; these tangible forms produce an analyzable occurrence of affect.

I read affect as a tool for understanding the phenomenal as constituted within specific socio-cultural spheres. This differs from fellow theorists who understand affect as pre-articulations of emotion. My approach to affect is indebted to Althusser and music scholar Robin James. In his reading of Althusser, Stuart Hall writes, "We experience ideology as if it emanates freely and spontaneously from within us."[40] In truth, "we are spoken by and spoken for, in the ideological discourses which await us even at our birth, into which we are born and find our place."[41] The romance is, in Althusser's framing, an ideological state apparatus framed through gender though with all the attendant baggage of racial capitalism. The "passive" affect that I assign to the romance form is, consequently, not some innate feminine quality but an active ideological construct. Robin James provides an accessible rendering of this dynamic with their reading of vibes, which has become a colloquial term for an aesthetic that negotiates between niche and mass tropes so as to generate an invitingly aspirational atmosphere. James turns to Ahmed's understanding of affect and horizons to describe vibes in terms of orientation—as I do in my readings of whiteness. James writes that "being oriented means having a vibe that is sufficiently attuned to our white supremacist capitalist patriarchal world to induce and amplify sympathetic resonances with it."[42] James describes this relation of vibes as "vibes-capitalism."[43] Such language is largely interchangeable for my purposes in this study. "Vibes, moods, feels—

[40] Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*, ed. Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg, Stuart Hall, Selected Writings (Durham : London: Duke University Press, 2016), 148.
[41] Hall, 148.
[42] This quotation comes from an excerpt of yet-unpublished work on vibes that James shared in her digital newsletter. Robin James, "What Is a Vibe?," Substack newsletter, *Its Her Factory Newsletter* (blog), January 29, 2021, https://itsherfactory.substack.com/p/what-is-a-vibe.
[43] Robin James, "What Is a Vibe?," Substack newsletter, *Its Her Factory Newsletter* (blog), January 29, 2021, https://itsherfactory.substack.com/p/what-is-a-vibe.

these are the instruments the culture of speculative finance capitalism uses to connect status-laden people to status-laden cultural objects and practices."[44] Likewise, one could say I am concerned with the vibes, moods, and feels of eighteenth-century romances.[45]

Through affect theory and whiteness studies, I build out the trajectory of intimate publics, from their genesis in radical potential to their collapse into white normativity. In re-articulating the intimate public model as one that straddles subversion and convention by way of affective intimacy and aesthetic appropriation, I create a paradigm for understanding amatory fiction and other intimate publics in more dynamic terms. Feeling and form become fluid moments of cultural output rather than static historical content. In many ways, this construct is a natural addition to eighteenth-century scholarship, considering the continual conversation within the field regarding the formation of public and private spheres. Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) remains the foundational text for these conversations.[46] In eighteenth-century Europe, Habermas argues, political, economic, and social factors re-constituted state, public, and private realms into overlapping spheres, and resulted in public spheres re-defining personhood and citizenry. Namely, the growth of mercantilism spurred state power to shift away from court life and into the public spheres of politics, literature, and economic life, and private realms of commodity exchange and family households. These various spheres were centered around the growth of the bourgeoisie public, whose private domestic lives interacted with public networks in a novel way. That Habermas argues the private realm existed

[44] James.

[45] These terms are not interchangeable, however, and I am speaking loosely in an effort to generate language that is functional for audiences beyond academia. Mitch Therieau, "Vibe, Mood, Energy," The Drift, January 19, 2022, https://www.thedriftmag.com/vibe-mood-energy/.

[46] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 1999.

through the bourgeois public sphere is pivotal.[47] Decades of scholarship has interacted with Habermas's, particularly on the points of the emergence of bourgeoisie culture and the interweavings of public spaces and private worlds. These interventions into Habermas's theory have largely revolved around historical precision and sociological accuracy. They all ask the impossible: what was life like in the eighteenth century? Given the imprecision of affect, my affective methodology assumes our inability to answer objectively this question and instead seeks to explore the limits of our scholarly imaginations.

In which the eighteenth century is not the main character

In 2020, the Main Character Syndrome meme emerged on TikTok and, unlike many other memes, retained cultural relevancy for the early years of the '20s. The meme takes the form of a video with audio—that latter of which defines the social media platform TikTok, along with TikTok's predictive algorithm. Intermittently sincere and satirical, the meme fashions creators as the main character of a film about their life. "You have to start romanticizing your life," one creator states. "You have to start thinking of yourself as the main character. Because if you don't, life will start passing you by."[48] The video features the creator, a young blonde woman, reclining on a beach in a bikini and sunglasses, with a filter that creates a sparkling diamond effect. The video has over 3 million views, 6,000 comments, and 500,000 likes. Conceptualizing oneself within a narrative is not new.

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[47] Habermas writes, "Included in the private realm was the authentic 'public sphere,' for it was a public sphere constituted by private people. Within the realm that was the preserve of private people we therefore distinguish again between private and public spheres. The private sphere comprised civil society in the narrower sense, that is to say, the realm of commodity exchange and of social labor; imbedded in it was the family with its interior domain (*Intimsphare*). The public sphere in the political realm evolved from the public sphere in the world of letters; through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society." Habermas, 30–31.

[48] @ashlaward, "Take a Second," May 26, 2020, https://www.tiktok.com/@ashlaward/video/6831269918864870661?is_copy_url=0&is_from_webapp=v1.

Self-narrativizing is a continual theme in eighteenth-century philosophy and becomes integral to the romance form and the romance mode, as citizens of the romance mode script their identity according to romance narratives. White feminism, linked to her romance through white femininity, involves a similar process of self-construction, and a similar conception of self as a "feminine citizen." "Feminine citizen" is how I refer to citizens of the romance form and acknowledge that the full rights of citizenship in eighteenth-century Britain were exclusive to men, and that heteropatriarchy hegemony continues to reify the same category of individuals as the ideal citizen. A feminine citizen relates to this hegemony through feminine ideology and the romance form. Lauren Berlant's intimate public model theorizes this self-narrativization through media as a means of establishing an identity according to the specific aesthetic and ideological alignments of intimate publics. Berlant emphasizes identity formation in relation to the specific communities of intimate publics. Because of their broader understanding of intimate publics, this belonging enables a more general citizenship in American culture because, for Berlant, western hegemony governs intimate publics generally. When arriving at specific intimate publics like women's culture, broader hegemonic ideologies of capitalism, race, gender, and so forth become siphoned into smaller ideological subsets to generate more direct attachments. Contemporary understandings of white femininity, produced through larger racial capitalist ideologies, govern women's culture. These variations produce divergent media for various intimate publics and intimate publics over time, but which nonetheless maintain parallel ideologies.

Berlant's intimate public model emerges from their "national sentimentality" project, which refers to *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* (1991), *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997), and *The Female Complaint* (2008). Sentimentality, according to Berlant, is the core affective requirement of acquiring American citizenship not in the legal but

the socio-cultural sphere. Individuals acquire this citizenship by generating a sense of self through mass media that reinforces their essentialized western identity determined according to heteropatriarchy. These media are siphoned into generalized identities based on their aesthetics and representative experiences. Repeatedly churned out over decades, an archive emerges, through which community takes shape. Sentimental feeling ties together community, media, and individual, such that affectively resonating with and aesthetically mirroring popular media grants the individual affective belonging to a community. While feeling, an intangible entity, defines citizenry in an intimate public, this feeling is accessed through commodity culture. Commodity culture is sutured into the overarching ideology of America: hyper-individualized racial capitalism, and its underlying principles of white heteropatriarchy. Consequently, Berlant writes, "[i]ntimate publics elaborate themselves through a commodity culture."[49] This commodification is material and affective. Whether purchasing hot rollers to curl one's hair to mirror a popular Hollywood star in the 1950s or excitedly telling a friend in 2019 about Kate Middleton and Meghan Markle's rumored feud, a commodified exchange occurs. An individual *buys into* an intimate public and receives citizenship in return—if that individual qualifies. Citizenry is necessarily exclusive to maintain power imbalance, but its purchasable entry gives the illusion of meritocracy.

With mass media, consumerism, and a desire to belong triangulating into intimate publics, an overdetermined universal notion of citizen emerges for each intimate sphere. The terms of citizenship become normativity, foregrounded in American sentimentalism, according to Berlant. Normative expectations of gender, race, and age are particularly pertinent in determining the universal concept of the citizen, in addition to factors such as class, location, and politics, all

[49] Berlant, 8.

of which funnel into a certain aesthetic that is public performed through related affects. This citizen is nothing more than an ideal. This citizen is an imagined and unachievable effigy, around which aspiring subjects congregate. Bits and pieces of this citizen are true, or at the very least *feel* true. The individual experience is "refracted" and affirmed through this ideal.[50] At every turn, intimate publics reify the individual as an isolated actor, in keeping with American capitalism. As aspiring subjects share with others a sense of relation to the ideal citizen, these subjects confirm their individual experiences as universal. In so doing, these subjects can claim belonging to the normative and ascend to citizenship—a citizenship that never fully acquires what the ideal citizen has: the good life.

The good life is a contented, fulfilled life that has achieved all the major milestones of American life; it is the American Dream, tailored to specific demographics and is always in the process of—but never actually—arriving. "A certain circularity structures an intimate public," Berlant writes.[51] This is true of the good life, as well, because the good life is an endless cycle of striving. The good life is the promise of an intimate public, and citizenship is seemingly the pathway towards that promise. But as an empty promise, the good life has nothing more to offer than the desire for the good life, the desire to *be* the model citizen, to fully embody the normative person who seems to have the good life. "[N]ormativity provides assurance that there is a whatever point for the reproduction of predictable life."[52] The ultimate end point of normativity, the good life becomes a concept towards which intimate publics direct their particular affects. In so doing, an intimate public becomes attached in a specific manner to their desire for the good life. Berlant writes, "whatever else it is, an object of desire is not only a thing, scene, or person,

[50] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, viii.
[51] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, viii.
[52] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 226.

but an affect: the affect associated with the pleasure of binding or attachment itself."[53] Wanting becomes enjoyable, even as the wanting never dissipates or becomes more painful. A sado-masochistic pleasure emerges in a citizen's attachment to the good life.

Berlant terms this attachment cruel optimism, which paradoxically sustains a citizen's attachment to the good life. "A relation of cruel optimism exists," Berlant writes, "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing."[54] The citizen never acquires what they want, because they keep wanting more and more. The good life is continually deferred not because the citizen pushes it away, but because her intimate public leads her to believe that more will result in even more happiness. Increasingly, the pleasure of chasing the good life supplants the desire for belonging and intimacy that enticed the individual into an intimate public. The citizens increasingly abstracts herself away from embodied relations and into the ideological ether of the good life. This disembodiment permeates the intimate public and dilutes the reciprocity that belonging and intimacy ideally provide. The intimacy of an intimate public is only a projected feeling of intimacy, indirectly generated through the attachments citizens share with particular media and the citizen's proximity to the normativity of the media. Buffered from others through commodity culture, a citizen connects sympathetically with others on the basis of their mutual attempts to achieve the unachievable. Such intimacies become even more tenuous when false path to the unachievable seems only to have space for a few citizens.

This unappealing dynamic tantalizes the citizen into commitment by easing other dilemmas born from modernity. Essentially, intimate publics do the thinking for you, which is a welcome relief under capitalism. Berlant writes, "sovereignty, while ideal, is a nightmarish

[53] Berlant, 266.
[54] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 1.

burden, a psychotic loneliness, and just tainted."[55] Intimate publics offer to carry the burden of sovereignty not simply by providing a model for living but by structuring that model as something to move towards. "In cruel optimism the subject or community turns its treasured attachments into safety-deposit objects that make it possible to bear sovereignty through its distribution, the energy of feeling relational, general, reciprocal, and accumulative."[56] Cruel optimism is like playing "Light as a Feather"—because one *wants* to believe levitation is possible, and because the weight of that individual is shared amongst many who also want to believe, that individual becomes weightless. The feminine citizen can float through life on her desire for the promises of her intimate public and her disembodied identity. Or, in Berlant's words, "In a relation of cruel optimism our activity is revealed as a vehicle for attaining a kind of passivity, as evidence of the desire to find forms in relation to which we can sustain a coasting sentience, in response to being too alive."[57]

Critically—and again paradoxically—this abdication of self to the intimate public grants its citizens a moral compass. The citizen is prioritizing the chase of the good live over their fellow cititzenry. The citizen "desires not to feel responsible for inhabiting or policing most social distinctions."[58] Fortunately, intimate publics alleviate responsibility through directing its citizens' identities and building an ethical schema into the affective aesthetic of these identities. Berlant writes, "intimate spheres *feel* like ethical places based on the sense of capacious emotional continuity they circulate, which seems to derive from an ongoing potential for relief from the hard, cold world."[59] An intimate public affirms its citizen's affective and emotional

[55] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 42.
[56] Berlant, 43.
[57] Berlant, 43.
[58] Berlant, 9.
[59] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 6–7.

attachments, and allows a citizen to assume others feel similarly. What that citizen believes is the universal and thus correct belief. And, since it is a universal position on say, immigration, that citizen does not need to *do* anything other than *feel* some kind of way because, presumably, other people who have the same universal belief and are not busy attaining the good life are taking care of things. This and many other convoluted aspects of intimate publics are clarified through Berlant's exploration of women's culture. This broader overview of intimate publics eventually illuminates how women's culture is both representative of and differentiated from intimate publics generally, and how my genealogical study reformulates theories of both intimate publics and women's culture.

The Female Complaint is Berlant's extended consideration of women's culture and the rhetoric of intimate publics. Women's culture, according to Berlant, dates to "at least the 1830s" and is predicated on femininized romantic desire and the marginalization of women. Berlant's corpus includes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which Berlant calls the "ur-text" of "white sentimentality,"[60] the 1927 novel *Show Boat* and its musical and film adaptations, and the novel *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983) and its film adaptation. Many of these works continue to appear in American culture: *A Star is Born* (1937) was recently remade in 2018 starring Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper. This mainstream entertainment media and women's culture media generally shares the narrative telos of the love plot, around which the perceived universal of an intimate public congregates. Through the love story, women's culture markets consumption as a means *and* an end. "[N]ormative femininity and aesthetic conventionality constitute the real central couple, with the love plot as the vehicle for and object of desire," Berlant writes.[61] For Berlant, this emphasis on love emerges in the nineteenth century, "during the consolidation of so-

[60] Berlant, 29.
[61] Berlant, 8.

called middle-class cultural values in the American and English Victorian periods, when romantic love became elevated over economic interest as the normative motivator of long-term couplings."[62] This reciprocity becomes the kernel of the ethical in women's culture. "Reciprocity is a morally laden, actuarial, and at the same time lovely, fantasy-based concept of what mutuality in love might actually be like: mutuality is a tableau, reciprocity a practice."[63] Through its dependence on heteronormativity and economic exchange, the love story is often organically attached to domestic experiences. Across its depictions of heteronormative love and domesticity, women's media traffics in a "feminine realist-sentimentality"[64]—an offshoot of the larger sentimentality of American intimate publics, according to Berlant. Feminine realism develops from women's secondary position in white heteropatriarchy. Writing on *Show Boat,* Berlant speaks to how women's culture "signifies expectations for women's disappointment in desire, their economic contingency, their abandonment to emotional isolation, their fantasies to be 'somebody' one way or another (in someone's or a public's eyes and arms)."[65] Women's culture proffers media that "realistically" depicts the burdens relegated to women. Part of the sentimental emerges here. In these realist depictions of feminine suffering, women can relate with their on-screen suffering sisters. These narratives become a space onto which women can project their female complaint. "The complaint genres of 'women's culture,' therefore, tend to foreground a view of power that blames flawed men and bad ideologies for women's intimate suffering."[66] And yet, these narratives also project the good life by "maintaining some fidelity to the world of distinction and desire that produced such disappointment in the first place."[67] These

[62] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 15.
[63] Berlant, 15–16.
[64] Berlant, x.
[65] Berlant, 98.
[66] Berlant, 2.
[67] Berlant, 2.

depictions of the good life generate another side of sentimental attachment. This sentimental spectrum of current complaints and future hopes attracts citizens, for whom women's culture becomes a roadmap for survival. Women's culture becomes "an archive of the tactics" collated from "survival subculture."[68] Women's media invites individual women to project their own marginalization onto mass media and develop intimacy with other women, whose own variegated projections tether them to the same media. Thus citizenship is acquired and the normativity of women's culture is constantly reaffirmed as the universal experience of womanhood. From this perceived experience of universal suffering, women's culture propagates a proprietary feminism. This feminism reads power structures through the sentimentality of women's culture. "[W]omen generate an affective and intimate public sphere that seeks to harness the power of emotion to change what is structural in the world."[69] Women's media stokes rage but quickly diverts this rage with yearning for the good life. The desire to change the forces that marginalize women becomes the desire to harness those forces for personal satisfaction. The feminism of women's culture does not offer solutions but instead functions primarily as an affective locus of belonging under political terms that conflate agency with feeling. It is, in Berlant's words, "juxtapolitical."

The juxtapolitics of women's culture feeds back into its citizenry, further reifying a particular notion of belonging accessed through commodity culture but achieved through affective and aesthetic identification. Taking the shape of cruel optimism, this identification recurs to sentimental suffering. Oppression and desire under patriarchy become two sides of the same coin, which a desiring citizen of women's culture must acquire to achieve its ethical standard. Berlant writes that "a culture of 'true feeling' emerges that sanctifies suffering as a relay

[68] Berlant, 75.
[69] Berlant, 12.

to universality."[70] The sentimentality of women's culture comes to define American womanhood. In defining the parameters of womanhood, women's culture defines those who cannot be a woman. Through women's culture, Berlant writes,

> U.S. "women's history" becomes white women's history, and white women's history becomes narrowed by being linked to a grander scheme of class amnesias: love plots and domestic fantasies come to saturate the narratives of experience and dreams of upward mobility through love with which a class of women are solicited to identify.[71]

That class of women are united in their white femininity. These women continually redirect their sentimentality in tandem with contemporary culture norms. These women achieve conventional success according to various barometers: class, appearance, family, and so on. They accumulate sympathy because their sentimental striving makes them seem deserving of these conventional successes. Proximity to whiteness is a mainstay—and less proximate women are used to claim "true feeling."

Reading media like *Imitation of Life* starring Lana Turner, Berlant describes this dynamic as "soft supremacy."[72] Soft supremacy is "rooted in compassion and coercive identification." In the guise of progressive aesthetics, soft supremacy "wants to dissolve all that structure [of inequality] through the work of good intentionality, while busily exoticizing and diminishing the inconvenient and the noncompliant."[73] The contradictions of feminine sentimentality enable the complicities of soft supremacy. Sentimentality requires soft supremacy because it demarcates the boundaries of "true feeling." Soft supremacy models a dynamic of suffering that distinguishes

[70] Berlant, 12.
[71] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 74.
[72] Berlant, 6.
[73] Berlant, 6.

between the citizen of women's culture and the non-citizen, who suffers so the citizen can display her ability to feel for others and thus assert her morality. The non-citizen's suffering is a point of identification for the citizen only insofar as she illustrates the injustices of patriarchy that also apply to the citizen—but which the citizen can climb over in her high heels, while shedding a tear for her inferior and herself. The non-citizen's suffering is endless because the good life is too far out of her reach, whether because of race, ethnicity, or class. The body, whether in appearance or affect, ultimately signals the non-citizen in women's culture. This is, according to Berlant, because of the larger understanding of the American citizen. "[B]y designating certain forms of legitimacy in abstract personhood and not the flesh, in American culture legitimacy derives from the privilege to suppress and protect the body."[74] Representationally, this personhood takes the form of a white man. Berlant, citing Richard Dyer's *White*, writes how this abstract notion of personhood is "the means by which whiteness and maleness were established simultaneously as 'nothing' and 'everything.'"[75] In being nothing, whiteness and maleness are the starting point, which in turn makes the abstracted white masculine body the universal. As the inverse of abstractness, a concrete and embodied form is far from the ideal. By this logic, all women are subject to the threat of abjection because all women, in their embodiment, threaten to exceed the norm of ideal personhood. The descent from ideally abstract to overembodied, or, "too muchness" is a steep slope. This is especially true for non-white women and women with non-ideal bodies. Women striving to belong seek to affiliate themselves through the sentimentality of women's culture, because this sentimentality allows them to have it all. They can criticize the system at the same time they embed themselves in it

[74] Berlant, 140.
[75] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 140.

because they are criticizing the system. Vacillating between rejection and embrace, they remain "ambivalent," according to Berlant[76]—and this ambivalence, though the source of communal belonging, is ultimately used to protect the individual citizen. Because what other choice does capitalism allow? Scholars such as Saidiya Hartman and Kyla Schuller have likewise discussed the deployment of sentimentalism in nineteenth-century America, with an emphasis on enslaved and formerly enslaved populations.[77] In *Cato's Tears*, Julie Ellison generates a lineage from Joseph Addison in the early eighteenth-century to Bill Clinton's 1998 impeachment.[78] Ellison's work is evidence of the historical continuities and cultural overlap between England and America—though Ellison makes critical distinctions between the two that I largely elide because my modern content originates from England. Like my project, Ellison uses intimate publics to understand modern gender identity—Ellison, however, focuses on masculinity.

In which the eighteenth century becomes the main character

Although woman's culture has become associated with post-World War II American culture, it originates in eighteenth-century Britain. In this period, the romance narrative is born from political and court culture and is soon wedded to mass media and consumerism. British philosophies of feeling, economy, nationalism, and imperialism inflect the romance narrative with gender and race ideologies. In this dialectic, a capitalist-charged sympathy defines white femininity, and white femininity becomes the basis of women's cultural belonging in Anglo-America. In constructing this lineage, I locate in the eighteenth-century romance form the origin

[76] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 2.
[77] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Race and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Kyla Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century*, Anima (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
[78] Julie K. Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2.

of women's culture's radical potential, its ongoing juxtapolitical and ambivalent affect, its suturing of sympathy and whiteness, and its reorienting of the radical potential of women's culture into the normativity of racial capitalism.

My first chapter establishes amatory fiction as a narratively and ideologically subversive form that, emerging in relation to modern consumerism, marks the beginning of the romance form. Amatory fiction's political interests and feminine eroticism within a commercial medium coalesce the romance form, the key technology of women's culture that interpellates individual feminine citizens. I straddle Berlant's genealogical boundaries and amend not only the historical reach but also the construction of intimate publics. I read *Fantomina*, *The History of the Nun* (1689), *Love in Excess* (1719), and *The Reform'd Coquet* (1724) as representative of dozens of similar amatory fictions. I collate the cultural setting of amatory fiction along with its innovative aspects that distinguish it from other literary forms and fiction genres to understand how amatory fiction generated belonging through a blend of extant expectations and ideological provocations. The literary marketplace, authorial identities, narrative form, and thematic interplay of state and gender politics through eroticism generate an intimate public for consumers to explore their cultural roles and personal feelings. The virtual space of the amatory intimate public contributes to the increasing significance of the individual that philosophies of feeling, social ethics, and economics are developing during the emergence of mercantile imperialism. Conversing with these philosophies, amatory fiction explores the imagination as a place of identity formation for readers. The romantic telos of these fictions ties together socio-political identity formation with romantic narrativization. Amatory fiction's politicized approach to romance intersected with accessible literary forms help shape the romance mode: a cultural script for belonging according to the burgeoning ideologies of racial capitalism. Gender, race, and class manifest within this

cultural script through affective dynamics such as passivity and sympathy. Subjected to commercial forces, amatory fiction evinces the instability of ideological subversion in the romance form: mercenary interests and cultural denigration thwart the ideological explorations of this early romance form. My analysis of amatory fiction's development–from experimental to codified–maps the progression of subsequent romance genres and how the romance form subsumes contemporary conversations into historical and emerging forms to proliferate the affective disciplining of individuals into capitalist citizens.

In my second chapter, I expand my affective genealogy across the eighteenth-century romance form, specifically reading how amatory fiction mutates within sentimental and domestic fictions according to the contemporary philosophy of sympathy. Reading novels such as Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) and Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, I argue that amatory fiction's material eroticism becomes a sentimental then skeptical eroticism. These eroticisms function as appropriations that simultaneously critique, subvert, and perpetuate contemporary ideologies. I argue that sympathy runs throughout the romance form's eroticisms in aesthetic re-packagings that maintain an affective emphasis on passivity and restraint; as such, sympathy becomes the affective boundary of the gendered ideal. Sympathy, if enacted properly, curtails desire and protects a woman from social demonization through the normative romantic union. I engage with Xine Yao's *Disaffected* (2021), in which Yao introduces the term sympathy contract but does not develop it sufficiently in relation to the romance form's affect of white femininity.[79] The sympathy contract codifies English citizenship in terms of subjective identification reliant on hierarchies of nationality, race, gender, and class. I build out this construct from my reading of amatory fiction's politicization of feeling.

[79] Xine Yao, *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America*, Perverse Modernities (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

My third chapter delves into the racial nature of the sympathy contract within the romance form. My romance genealogy intersects with racialization, developing white femininity as a model of womanhood that propagates racial capitalism and attendant ideologies of whiteness. I read how amatory fiction politicizes passivity and narrative sympathy through its material eroticism in the Violenta novella from Manley, Penelope Aubin, and Haywood (1720, 1722, 1727). I argue that sentimental novels like Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) continue in this tradition and unpins sympathy from aristocratic models only to reattach sympathy to the whiteness of capitalism through its sentimental eroticism. With domestic fictions like Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817) and *Mansfield Park* (1814), I show that skeptical eroticism negotiates a cultural violence and responds with a sympathy that turns to a rhetoric of comfort in line with whiteness. I consider how the romance form's presentation of sympathy gravitates towards white feminism, wherein a spectacle of passivity asserts racial and gender hierarchies.

In my fourth chapter, I trace eighteenth-century romances' racializing sympathy in neoliberal feminism and Austen's commercial status in the 1990s and early 2000s. This decade saw an explosion of interest in Austen and the proliferation of historical and modern Austen adaptations. Film and TV adaptations translate Austenian comfort into a modern neoliberal comfort that provides a psychic reprieve through nostalgia and emphasizes material comfort. What emerges is a commodity eroticism, wherein popular media mandates erotic pleasure be found in commodities. In alignment with neoliberal culture, these commodities include the self and romance. My analysis of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) elucidates how the neoliberal romance genre of chick lit evacuates the political and philosophical interests of eighteenth-century romances while retaining the skeleton narrative–namely the enemies-to-lovers trope that Austen's canon popularized. In this transformation, the romance form emphasizes cultural

belonging as a public process of writing the self into a romance heroine. A postfeminist sensibility navigates this self-narrativization, wherein the language of feminism is depoliticised and treated as a commodity intermittently used to adapt identity to cultural trends. The telos of womanhood remains dampening one's identity into the container of normativity, even if that identity that exceeds the ideal white femininity is what first generates the hero's attraction and the heroine's relatability. This process still requires violence, though this violence is increasingly the responsibility of the individual, rather than enforced through socio-cultural mandates. The dynamic of sympathy changes with this neoliberal shift. Sympathy is abstracted even more to the emotional realm, in parallel with the abstracted demands of neoliberal citizenship. Advantageous marriages and the good life are more a matter of appearance than tangible class markers such as titles and estates. Simultaneously, consumer culture becomes a means for signaling neoliberal success; but the proliferation of consumerism and the developing commodification of self similarly feeds into the abstraction of the good life. With purchasable entities everywhere, their meanings are evacuated into empty signifiers. In the face of neoliberal vagueness, the romance form is a consistent structure through which to mediate identity. Romance is a space within which the ambivalences of postfeminism find expression, as the romance form enables playful acceptance and rejection–until the happy ending, where acceptance of hegemony is still required. A long-standing canonical figure whose narrative arcs and canon provide comfort in their familiarity, the commercial 1990s Austen emerges as the exemplar of the eighteenth-century's influence on the neoliberal romance's meditation of feminine belonging.

My fifth chapter considers the eighteenth-century romantic residue of feminine belonging and white femininity in 2010s middlebrow fiction likened to *Bridget Jones's Diary*: Dolly Alderton's *Ghosts* and Carty-Williams's *Queenie* (2018). *Ghosts* centers on a thirty-something

white English woman traversing online dating while *Queenie* follows a Jamaican-English woman reckoning with her toxic relationship with men. In comparing the two, I argue that both novels evince affective and formal continuity with eighteenth-century romances through neoliberal feminism–specifically the 2010s girlboss iteration of feminism that brought corporate culture to girl power. Through neoliberalism, sympathy and eroticism are increasingly individualized and commodified. An abstraction also occurs through this individualization and commodification. Affective citizenship is more nebulous and, with the influence of postfeminism, has an increased ambivalent awareness of heteronormativity. Both novels struggle with the onus on the individual, especially Queenie as her intersectionality precludes her from transforming herself into the ideal feminine citizen. The ambivalence of these novels speaks to a radical potential. *Queenie*, through its diverse perspective and heightened political awareness, moves the juxtapolitical into the political so as to present a seemingly uncommodifiable radical potential. Part of this political is the self-sympathy that Queenie must develop in a world that only sees her as fungible excess. Similarly, *Ghosts* holds radicality in the genesis of self-sympathy and separation from a marital telos. But the depiction of self-sympathy in *Ghosts* protects the feminine attachment to the good life. Culminating in unexamined nostalgia, *Ghosts* stages white femininity as a performance of individual authenticity according to late 2010s neoliberal commodity eroticism.

I conclude with a brief consideration of the romance form in other contemporaneous media to extend the implications of my project beyond the novel and return to the romance form's eighteenth-century origins. Centuries later, feminine desire continues to circulate in popular media through an aesthetic of excess that is intertwined with the ideologies of racial capitalism. Whether tracking the union of Melliora and D'Elmont in Haywood's *Love in Excess*

or the sundering of Taylor Swift and Jake Gyllenhaal in Swift's music, the romance form transposes the intangibly ideological onto the immediately personal realm of desire. The economic and cultural precepts of racial capitalism frame feminine erotic desire. Resultingly, the erotic is limited to the sexual, with the romantic qualifying as erotic because the romantic operates heteronormative unions oriented towards the good life, and this trajectory ideologically sanitizes the sexually erotic. The romance form's eroticism is not "an assertion of the lifeforce of women," as Audre Lorde describes the erotic untethered to racial capitalism.[80] This innate erotic is a joyful and generative force that enables an introspective connection from which interpersonal bonds can form across difference. Lorde writes that as women, "we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex."[81] Racial capitalism sequesters the erotic into the sexual. As a technology of racial capitalism, the romance form is a technology that helps teach this lesson.

[80] Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 55.
[81] Lorde, 55.

Chapter 1: The Excessive Intimacy of Amatory Fiction

In this chapter, the conventions of amatory fiction alongside Berlant's paradigm of women's culture illustrate how amatory fiction is an originating moment in women's culture. Amatory fiction, unlike previous British media, structures the romantic dyad around women's erotic desires in the increasingly accessible and commodified literary marketplace. Building on its authors political and theatrical backgrounds, amatory fiction merges politics, philosophy, and entertaining yet comfortably familiar content. In this narrative blending, which also props up women as entrepreneurial and progressive figures, amatory fiction contributes to the most significant aspect of modern women's culture: its juxtapolitical attachments.

The category of amatory fiction is largely an anachronistic description. The term refers loosely to prose texts published in the 1680s-1730s, with an emphasis on the 1720s when the production of such amorously inclined fictions boomed in large part to Eliza Haywood's shocking productivity. It has been distinguished, both contemporaneously and historically, through the "fair triumvirate of wit"—the moniker James Sterling applies for Behn, Manley, and Haywood in the dedicatory poem written for Haywood's 1732 collected edition.[82] As a cross-germination of domestic and foreign media, amatory fictions take place across an array of scenes, from contemporary England to sixteenth-century Spain, with wide-ranging depictions of class that speak to equally diverse political affiliations and ethical conceits. Nonetheless, through shared themes, tropes, and style a propriety amatory aesthetic emerges; I term this aesthetic "feminine excess."

[82] James Sterling, "To Mrs. Eliza Haywood, on Her Writings," in *Secret Histories, Novels, and Poems*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (London: Samuel Richardson, 1732), iii, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0111890445/ECCO?sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=28d08903&pg=5.

Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina* is bursting with this feminine excess. In the novella, the anonymous woman (whom scholars refer to as Fantomina) attends the theater, where she is exposed to two sights: courtesans and witty gentlemen. Fantomina is a young woman fresh from the country, so seeing the courtesans and gentlemen "excited a Curiosity in her to know in what manner these Creatures [the women], were addressed."[83] She returns to the theater dressed in the style of these women, unaware that their decorum result from their profession and their dress signals as much. The naïve Fantomina is quickly launched into the world of eroticism when she espies Beauplaisir. Beauplaisir, a man about town, deploys his charms on Fantomina, who understands their new relationship simply as a flirtation. But Beauplaisir understands their brief interaction and Fantomina's presentation as proof of contract. In short, he assaults Fantomina, which does not deter Fantomina from continuing their relationship given the freedoms and pleasure she finds in it. Fantomina's interest in Beauplaisir quickly explodes into erotic need:

> All the Charms of *Beauplaisir* came fresh into her Mind; she languish'd, she almost dy'd for another Opportunity of conversing with him; and not all the Admonitions of her Discretion were effectual to oblige her to deny laying hold of that which offer'd itself the next Night.[84]

Fantomina's unwieldy eroticism is eventually stifled when she falls pregnant, and her affair can no longer remain hidden. Fantomina represents one end of amatory fiction, wherein an excessive erotic woman is tamed; on the other end, heroines who tame their eroticism before the narrative's end ascend to a socially respectable romantic union. Either way, amatory fiction traffics in feminine excess.

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[83] Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina and Other Works*, ed. Alexander Pettit, Margaret Case Croskery, and Anna C. Patchias, Broadview Literary Texts (Peterborough, Ont.; Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2004), 227.
[84] Haywood, 229.

The genre's narrativization of feminine excess derives from narrative and cultural influences such as classic romances, seventeenth-century French romances, Augustan satire, Restoration court culture, contemporary theater, political turmoil, and emergent commodity culture. Amatory fiction takes from classic romances the "ethos of erotic heroism" and the "rhetorical hyperbole" in order to demonstrate characters' sincerity of feeling and virtue.[85] Classic chivalric romances such Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485) are "governed by an ideal of romantic love based on selfless devotion to the beloved," Stephen Ahern writes.[86] Chivalric romances structure their narratives through the dyad of lovers, which promotes a particular power balance that protects the chaste virtue of the feminine lover. Chivalric conventions become the formal basis of amatory fiction. The chivalric's "focus on pathos as well as on the contrived quality of scenes of excess is the core feature that connects the early verse romance to the later prose romances" Ahern writes.[87] But amatory fiction does not strictly replicate these conventions. Rather, the genre breaks chivalric tradition by foregrounding women's erotic desires in its narratives; this shift upends the unidirectional dyad of chivalric love and requires mutual passion *and* heroism in both of its lovers.

Amatory fiction's explicit sexuality borrows from the libertinism of Restoration court culture. Kathleen Lubey's *Excitable Imaginations* (2012) delineates eroticism as a literary mode of the eighteenth century that allowed for philosophical exploration. Tracing eroticism from seventeenth-century libertine poetry to mid-eighteenth-century novels, Lubey claims sexual aesthetics become embedded within literary culture. Lubey reads this aesthetic growth as

[85] Stephen Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities: Romantic Excess and the Genealogy of the Novel, 1680-1810*, [AMS Studies in the Eighteenth Century, no. 49] (New York: AMS Press, 2007), 12.

[86] Ahern, 17.

[87] Ahern, 34.

indicative of a consciousness that is able to self-analyze through a projected abstraction of self. The imagination that eroticism demands prompts a space onto which a reader can project and critique a self. According to Lubey, "intimate texts from the late seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries understand eroticism to enable epistemological insight into an ungendered model of mind."[88] The philosophic possibilities of the erotic derive from the libertine ego and its "erotic sublime that revels in the power of the ego."[89] The selfishness of libertinism is at odds with the selflessness of the heroic romances. Amatory fiction deals with this tension through acknowledging women's desires and re-articulating virtue as an accessible concept rather than a static aristocratic state.

From these various origins and from its new additions, amatory fiction develops particular topoi such as the mutually desiring and equally virtuous romantic dyad, and seduction narratives between virtuous heroines and villainous rakes, all told through extravagant language. I denominate this aesthetic and its components as feminine excess, because of the relationship between body and self that is constituted in amatory fiction and because I read amatory fiction as a predecessor to women's culture. An ongoing ideological concern in heteropatriarchy, the threat of feminine excess becomes a primary theme in the romance form. I read this feminine excess as an unstable aesthetic that divides permissible and unacceptable feminine behavior throughout the romance form. In a similar manner, Stephen Ahern reads eighteenth-century romance through the "aesthetic of excess."[90] Ahern identifies a structure of repetition, the tension between desire and

[88] Kathleen Lubey, *Excitable Imaginations: Eroticism and Reading in Britain, 1660-1760*, Transits: Literature, Thought & Culture (Lewisburg : Lanham, Md: Bucknell University Press : Co-published with The Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Group, 2012), 26.

[89] Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities*, 43.

[90] Stephen Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities: Romantic Excess and the Genealogy of the Novel, 1680-1810*, [AMS Studies in the Eighteenth Century, no. 49] (New York: AMS Press, 2007), 12.

duty, and emotional extravagance as the main components of the aesthetic of excess in amatory fiction. While homoerotic friendships are critical relationships, heteronormative sexuality frames these dynamics. Amatory fiction understands the erotics of sexual desire as stemming from affective orientations in line with heteronormativity.[91] Socially constructed notions of reason embodied in the concept of virtue mediate the threats of feminine excess into permissible desire. "The amatory novella offered the prospect of a female body that was not only desired but also desiring," Aparna Gollapudi writes.[92] "And yet, the female sexual desire that amatory fiction made visible required reconciliation to the sociomoral injunctions about women's chastity and modesty." Amatory fiction positions erotic desire against normative expectations to generate ethical dilemmas of individual actors.

To produce such ethical dilemmas from passionate intensity, amatory tales focus on young adult women whose inexperience with the world comes into conflict with their commitment to virtue and newly discovered sexual desire. Narratives of heroines staving off or succumbing to desire offered, supposedly, educational narratives for readers. Whether through social constructs or physical mechanics, women were presented as more susceptible to the passions, and thus required the educatory model of the threatened heroine. Aphra Behn's early amatory novella *The History of the Nun: or, the Fair Vow-Breaker* (1689) ruminates on education and politics through the beautiful and wealthy Isabella, who, like many heroines, is motherless. Her father places Isabella in the convent where his sister is the abbess on the condition that Isabella is granted the choice to remain in or leave the convent when she reaches maturity.

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[91] Writing on Haywood, Lubey explains how contemporary understanding posited that women received "impressions that differ not in kind but by degree from those experienced by their male counterparts." With the added caveat that "however natural this impressionability seems to be in women, Haywood argues that cultural practice only promotes their damaging mental stasis." Lubey, *Excitable Imaginations*, 96.

[92] Aparna Gollapudi, "Virtuous Voyages in Penelope Aubin's Fiction," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 45, no. 3 (2005): 674, https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2005.0028.

Isabella, who has recently attracted the suitor Villenoys, decides to pursue her religious vows and reject Villenoys. She is, according to the narrator, "the most prudent of her sex."[93] In the convent, Isabella befriends Katterina; when Katterina shows Isabella a minature of her brother Henault, Isabella "turns as pale as Ashes, and, being ready to swound, she bid [Katterina] take it away, and could not, for her Soul, hide the sudden surprise the Picture brought."[94] The body functions in amatory fiction as the primary indicator of feeling, with the narrative syntax following close behind. Lingering descriptions of bodies and impassioned dialogues of struggling to suppress the body abound. Isabella tells Katterina, "so much Mistress I am of my Passions, when they give me warning of their approach, and sure I can withstand the greatest assaults of Fate, if I can but foresee it; but if it surprize me, I find I am as feeble a Woman, as the most unresolv'd."[95] On the surface, amatory fiction heroines fall into two categories: those who pursue their desire and are punished, and those who stay true to their virtue and are rewarded with their object of the desire.

Isabella seemingly falls into the first category, because she flees from the nunnery to marry Henault. Henault's father revokes his inheritance and the couple falls into dire straits as their background has left them unfamiliar with the likes of housewifery and farming. Desperate to curry favor with his father, Henault joins the army and leaves behind a newly pregnant Isabella. The melodrama soon reaches a fever pitch of absurdity as retribution for Isabella's broken vows. Henault apparently dies on the battlefield, where he has befriended Villenoys, the rejected suitor. Villenoys finds his way to Isabella, and the pair marry because they believe Henault has died on the battlefield. When Henault unexpectedly returns, Isabella decides to

[93] Behn, "The History of the Nun," 26.

[94] Aphra Behn, "The History of the Nun," in *Popular Fiction by Women, 1660-1730: An Anthology*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1996), 22–23. Katterina comments that if she were to wear men's clothes, she would look identical to her brother—a comment that hits on two recurring amatory tropes of crossdressing and homoeroticism.

[95] Behn, 36.

murder him in order to avoid accusations of oath-breaking and bigamy. She enlists Villenoys in the task of removing Henault's body, having falsely informed him that Henault died upon hearing of her marriage. Isabella sews Villenoy's jacket to the murdered Henault, such that when Villenoys heaves the body into the river he falls with it. Isabella has cared more for her reputation, than her virtue: a fault that other heroines display as well. In Haywood's *Fantomina*, Fantomina "had Discernment to foresee and avoid all those ills which might attend the Loss of her *Reputation,* but was wholly blind to those of the Ruin of her *Virtue*."[96] Yet, Fantomina doesn't care: she "grew perfectly easy with the Remembrance she had forfeited" her sexual innocence.[97] But, these tales connect public reputation and private virtue. Fantomina becomes pregnant, embodying her excessive sexuality in public. Because she refuses to marry Beauplaisir, her mother forces her into a nunnery. On the more violent spectrum, Isabella is executed for her romantic pursuits, but happily so. "When the Day of Execution came, she appear'd on the Scaffold all in Mourning, but with a Meen so very Majestick and Charming, and a Face so surprizing Fair, where no Languishment or Fear appear'd, but all Chearful as a Bride, that she set all Hearts a flaming."[98] Her last words are "a Speech of half an Hour long, so Eloquent, so admirable a Warning to the Vow-Breakers, that it was as amazing to hear her, as it was to behold her."[99] Isabella retains the beauty that Behn initially associated with her virtuousness. As an eventual murderer, Isabella is obviously not a paragon of ethical virtue. So why does she make murder look so beautiful?

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[96] Eliza Haywood, "Fantomina," in *Popular Fiction by Women, 1660-1730: An Anthology*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1996), 232.

[97] Haywood, 232.

[98] Behn, "The History of the Nun," 148.

[99] Behn, 148.

Amatory fiction's social confrontations is supplemented with its awareness of state politics, born from its authors' political backgrounds and committed interests. Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley were particularly close to the political arena. Aphra Behn was a spy for Charles II in the Netherlands, albeit not a very good one.[100] Delarivier Manley's father served as a military officer with close court ties; Manley married her older cousin after her father's death, unaware that her cousin was already married. Manley, following the demise of this marriage, lived briefly in the home of Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland.[101] These experiences influenced Aphra Behn's and Delarivier Manley's literary careers, which began with political satire and plays, and helped form amatory fiction's ideological complexities. Their lived political experiences influenced such work. Behn's *Love-Letters* (1689) and Manley's *The Royal Mischief* (1696) and *New Atalantis* (1709) are examples of their works that are on the periphery of amatory fiction. As such, they offer the boundaries of the genre and help to chart the key tendencies of amatory fiction. Behn's *Love-Letters* and Manley's *New Atalantis* function in the roman à clef tradition of French literature, wherein contemporary political events are coded into fictional narratives. Behn and Manley construct romantic versions of these tales that offer the passions as a vehicle for political involvement.

Written as an epistolary novel, Behn's *Love-Letters* is an exchange between Silvia and Philander. The pair's mutual erotic interest is at odds with their opposing political allegiances, which feel especially urgent with the narrative backdrop of the Monmouth Rebellion.[102] Michael

[100] Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (London: Pandora, 2000), 80–115.
[101] Rachel Carnell, *A Political Biography of Delarivier Manley*, Eighteenth-Century Political Biographies (London ; Brookfield, Vt: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), 11.
[102] Behn writes Silvia as Ford Lord Grey and Silvia as his wife's sister, Lady Henriette Berkeley. Lord Grey partook in a 1685 rebellion against King James II under the Duke of Monmouth. The Rebellion failed and James II maintained power for three more years. Helen Thompson, *Ingenuous Subjection: Compliance and Power in the Eighteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 10.

McKeon writes that "Behn's experimental deployment of the roman à clef form allows her to oscillate between reference to the actual particularity of historical personages and the concrete particularity of 'characters' whose broad exemplarity defines the virtual collectivity of a public readership."[103] McKeon's language signals how the movement from the particular or individuated to the political generates a readerly experience. Stephen Ahern similarly marks *Love-Letters* with significance for how it harnesses courtly language into a seduction narrative. Of particular import to Ahern and the readerly experience is how Behn models politics as agency through her lovers. Whereas Philander the seducer represents libertine court culture and its excessive erotics and skepticism, Silvia's passion emphasizes the experiential as an empirical mode. Tierney-Hynes notes that, in keeping with Behn's politics, *Love-Letters* promoted Stuart interests.

In contrast, Manley's *New Atalantis* is a sprawling and politically damning fiction. If Swift likened satire to a mirror,[104] *New Atalantis* offers satire as a keyhole looking into a forbidden room. Manley frames her tale as a voyeuristic allegory, wherein Astrea, the goddess of justice, tours the fictional Atalantis. Manley's Atalantis is a whirlwind of illicit sexual affairs occurring within the royal court. In one early scene, Manley describes an affair between Charles II's mistress Barbara Palmer, Countess of Castlemaine, Duchess of Cleveland and Henry Jermyn, Baron of Dover.

> The burning lover thought it was now time to put an end to his pretended sleep; he collapsed her in his arms, grasped her to his bosom, her own desires

[103] Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 507.

[104] Jonathan Swift, "The Battle of the Books," in *A Tale of a Tub, and Other Works*, ed. Angus Ross and David Woolley, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford : New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 104.

> helped the deceit; she shut her eyes with a languishing sweetness, calling him by intervals, her dear Count, her only lover, taking and giving a thousand kisses.[105]

Manley weaves together political power and individual action through erotic sensibilities. Sexual passion becomes the means for achieving power in *New Atalantis*, as well as a means of illustrating interiority. Manley signals the political plotting Count Germanicus (a fictionalization of Jermyn, Baron of Dover) within the semantics of his desire. The Count reveals a continual awareness of the present situation: "it was now time to put an end to his pretended sleep;" "her own desires helped the deceit." Germanicus had plotted this affair with Count Fortunatus (a fictionalization of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough), as a means of liberating Fortunatus from the Duchess's attentions. Manley illustrates how Germanicus understands the present power dynamic and how, in contrast to the Duchess, he perceives himself as retaining a rational consciousness in the face of all-consuming lust. Casting a satirical gaze on these political dynamics, Manley mainly targets the Tory party and Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough. That Manley was imprisoned for libel indicates the seriousness with which her work was read. Unlike Behn's roman à clef, or secret history as they came to be called in English, Manley eventually offered a key to *New Atalantis* that revealed her targets. McKeon writes that "what is unlocked by the key is not the real name of a public person but an amplification of private pseudonymy."[106] Manley's secret history, though ostensibly undermining political figures through divulging court gossip, reinforces the potential for individual figures to manipulate their identities.

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[105] Manley, *New Atalantis*, ed. Rosalind Ballaster, Pickering Women's Classics (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1991), 21.

[106] McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, 590.

New Atalantis and Manley's political periodicals, as well as her amatory fictions, use the hyperbole of satire to direct readers towards the moral possibilities of sociability. A project of Anthony Ashley-Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury that the Whigs embraced, sociability understood social discourse and refinement as part of an ethics of sympathy. Contemporaries Joseph Addison and Richard Steele in *The Tatler* (1709-1711) and *The Spectator* (1711-1712, 1714) deploy Whiggish sociability through wit and satire. Anthony Pollock describes how "according to this ideal, the reflective work induced by satire can make the participants in public culture curb the disruptive, idiosyncratic excesses in their own behavior by re-awakening their ostensibly natural impulses toward benevolent sociability."[107] Manley mimics their form with *The Female Tatler* (1709-1710), adopting cross-party logic as she herself was a dedicated Tory Royalist.[108] The satire Manley injects in her political writing extends to her amatory fictions in the juxtaposition of exaggeration and political conceits, largely through the role of the narrator.

The satirical nature of Manley's writing remained a fixture in amatory fiction, specifically through the targeting of specific individuals and the narratorial voice. Eliza Haywood's *Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1725) is, as Kathryn King writes, "a hybrid satire on the state of the nation that uses amatory codes and conventions of the earlier seductions fictions to indict the failure of British institutions to redress the grievances of the most vulnerable members of society."[109] It is also a satire aimed at Martha Fowke, Haywood's rival for the attention of Aaron Hill. Aside from being a fantastical romance, Haywood's *Adventures of Eovaai, Princess of Ijaveo: A Pre-Adamitical History* (1736) is an

[107] Anthony Pollock, *Gender and the Fictions of the Public Sphere, 1690-1755* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 79–80.

[108] Authorship of *The Female Tatler* is not entirely clear. Consensus is that Manley wrote the opening issues and her arrest for libel interrupted her authorship.

[109] Kathryn King, *A Political Biography of Eliza Haywood* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), 37.

indictment of the Robert Walpole administration. Because of their gender and writings, Haywood and Manley were excluded from the prominent literary circles of their time, namely the Scriberlus and Kit-Kat Clubs. And yet, "The scandal chronicles of Haywood, and Delarivier Manley before her, might be cited as the shadowy forebears, the 'mothers' of Pope's own scandalous writing," writes Ros Ballaster.[110] In a revisiting of earlier arguments, Ballaster explores how Haywood's use of masculine narrators lend a satirical voice to her texts, akin to Manley's satirical deployment of men narrating her life in *Adventures of Rivella* (1714).[111] Haywood's satire, and Manley's, reads as epistemological skepticism. Ballaster writes of Haywood's *Eovaai*, "Put simply, readers are encouraged to snigger not only at her satiric targets, but at the allegorical seriousness of satire itself."[112] Skepticism undergirds Haywood's satirical projects and her attempt to create, as Ballaster describes it, "a rival aesthetics more hospitable to the imagining of agency for women as writers and political 'plotters.'"[113]

But ultimately on the narrative surface of amatory fiction, passion directs action to establish the central formal dilemma of amatory fiction: the interplay between feeling and what happens *to* individuals versus choice and what action individuals can take. Philosophy at the time contrasted the passions as external social agents that affected individuals against the rational internal emotions that humans could combat through reason. Ahern writes, "a notion of 'the passions' rather than of 'emotions' was still dominant in the picture of what it means to be human; this entailed in the first instance a conception of *being acted upon* rather than operating

[110] Ros Ballaster, "A Gender of Opposition: Eliza Haywood's Scandal Fiction," in *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work*, ed. Kirsten T. Saxton and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 151.

[111] Ballaster, 144.

[112] Ballaster, 146.

[113] Ballaster, 144.

actively when it comes to the drivers of motive and behavior."[114] Though understandings of the passions varied among writers and philosophers, general consensus viewed the passions as demonstrative of a subject's passive agency, wherein the passions were oriented externally to a subject. Rebecca Tierney-Hynes writes,

> Definitions of the passions in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy range from Locke's simple definition—that passion is the involuntary response of any subject, animate or inanimate, being acted upon—to Hume's secondary or "reflective impressions" arising out of impressions of sensation. These and other definitions—those of Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, and [Francis] Hutcheson in particular—agree in their conclusion that the passions occupy a liminal space between sensation and intellection and, despite having a "reflective" quality that suggests their kinship to the Lockean "idea," are more closely allied to sensation than to reflection.[115]

In part because of their external fomentation, the passions partially embodied social constructs. Aleksondra Hultquist writes, "Primarily, the passions were thought to be public, rather than private; they were a social phenomenon which was anchored by a shared morality."[116] "Nature was frail, and the Tempter strong" Behn writes of Isabella as she considers her predicament of bigamy in *History of the Nun*.[117] Isabella is subjected *to* her fear of social infamy. Fear and the

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[114] Stephen Ahern, "Nothing More Than Feelings?: Affect Theory Reads the Age of Sensibility," *The Eighteenth Century* 58, no. 3 (2017): 283, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecy.2017.0025.

[115] Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, "Fictional Mechanics: Haywood, Reading, and the Passions," *The Eighteenth Century* 51, no. 1–2 (2010): 156, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecy.2010.0005.

[116] Aleksondra Hultquist, "Eliza Haywood's Progress through the Passions," in *Passions, Sympathy and Print Culture: Public Opinion and Emotional Authenticity in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Kerr, David Lemmings, and Robert Phiddian (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 88.

[117] Aphra Behn, "The History of the Nun," in *Popular Fiction by Women, 1660-1730: An Anthology*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1996), 37.

passions generally are the greatest threat to Isabella and other amatory characters. "And after a thousand convulsions, even worse than death itself, she resolved upon the murder of Henault."[118] This extravagance of language embeds a reader in the present moment. Nothing is comparable to the urgency of *this* exact moment. And this urgency is born from the centrality of the passions. The passions subsume an individual, obscuring one's ability to reason and thus empirically investigate the situation at hand. Emotions isolate characters within themselves. The intensity of passions, then, are more significant than the unfolding of the narrative. Even more specifically, the tension between erotic desire and socially sanctioned choices structure the key moments of Behn's *History of the Nun*. When Villenoys lugs the body of Henault, "love lent him strength."[119] Villenoys becomes complicit in a murder *and* the victim of his own murder through his passion for Isabella. In many fictions, the enthrall of the passions disguise didacticism and political undercurrents.

Dressed to excess

At times punished, rewarded, or a mix of both, the passions are not clearly moralized across the genre, or even within an author's corpus. Haywood willingly punished sexual desire and along with it certain manifestations of women's individual agency, positioning aspects of her work alongside normative expectations for British women. The boundaries of feminine excess, even within an aesthetic of excess, are always changing. This constant fluctuation means the heroine is always under threat. Other women in proximity to the heroine ultimately provide the best method for charting the link between heroine and jezebel—just as white feminism does

[118] Behn, 37.

[119] Behn, 39.

centuries later. Haywood's *Love in Excess* does this throughout its three volumes. The novel is grounded in Count D'Elmont, whose hero's journey takes the form of fending off the numerous women he keeps accidentally attracting. Through this journey, D'Elmont becomes the rightful lover for Melliora—the young woman who, after the death of her father, becomes D'Elmont's ward. The novel opens with two women—neither of them Melliora—vying for D'Elmont's attention. Through typical amatory hijinks involving anonymous letters, D'Elmont confuses the two women and marries the wrong one. His jealous wife sends D'Elmont's preferred woman to a convent and, upon Melliora's arrival, creates a trap to catch D'Elmont in bed with Melliora. Things go awry—in part because *another* woman throws herself in D'Elmont's bed—and D'Elmont's wife ends up dead. The novel by now has confirmed that Melliora and D'Elmont are our heroic lovers, but the couple have to overcome even more erotic trials. Namely, a rake kidnaps Melliora and tries to force her into marriage. D'Elmont, on his path to finding Melliora, has to survive one last woman desperate for his attention. This woman, Ciamara, is the most overtly sexual, which is a tall order in the novel.

Ciamara demonstrably externalizes her sexual desire, and as such is an overly active woman whom the narrative punishes with ignominy and suicide. Ciamara is so excessively sexual, that even her surroundings connote an erotic sensuality. Haywood, in D'Elmont's perspective, introduces the reader to Ciamara through her apartments.

> Count D'Elmont could not forbear giving truce to his more serious reflections, to admire the beauties of the place he was in; wherever he turned his eyes, he saw nothing but what was splendidly luxurious, and all the ornaments

> contrived in such a manner, as might fitly be a pattern, to paint the palace of the Queen of Love by.[120]

While this home sounds like an ideal setting for an amatory fiction, the attention that Haywood gives to its constructedness reveals its sinister nature. The sheer materiality of the abode disturbs D'Elmont's internal, amorous reflections on his beloved Melliora–this movement from the imaginative space of the passion to the lived social world is eminently regrettable. D'Elmont's remarks indicate the superfluity of the material world when the virtuous passions are involved. "How heavenly would be this place," said he to himself sighing, "if I expected Melliora here! But Oh! how preferrable were a cottage blest with her, to all this pomp and grandeur with any other."[121] Haywood reveals the seams of the room, noting the "most artificially" woven tapestries that display classical Roman love myths.[122] Rather than provide a rich ekphrastic moment, these tapestries merely mark an accrual of femininity and luxury. Haywood presents Ciamara in similar terms of conflicted adoration. "[N]othing could be more glorious than her appearance; she was by nature, a woman of a most excellent shape, to which, her desire of pleasing, had made her add all the aids of art."[123] Ciamara *adds* a surplus of femininity to her body. This is in stark contrast to Melliora, whom Haywood describes at one point as having "a negligence more beautiful than all the aids of art could form in the most exact *decorum* of dress."[124] Ciamara, on the other hand, is so overladen with effort that even a description of her hair is lengthy.

[120] Haywood, *Love in Excess, or, The Fatal Enquiry*, 205–6.

[121] Haywood, 206–7.

[122] Haywood, 206.

[123] Haywood, 207.

[124] Haywood, 107.

> her hair, of which she had a great quantity, was black as jet, and with a studied negligence, fell part of it on her neck in careless ringlets, and the other was turned up, and fastened here and there with bodkins, which had pendant diamonds hanging to 'em, and as she moved, glittered with a quivering blaze, like stars darting their fires from out a sable sky.[125]

Ciamara is inundated with luxurious objects, and the manner of description exaggerates this quality of Ciarmara's person. Having not seen her dress, the reader cannot judge how "studied" Ciamara's "negligence" actually is. In describing the movement of her hair pins, Haywood asks the reader to imagine the movement of Ciamara's form–an image that does not add any narrative detail. The language of "quivering blaze" and "stars darting their fires" is erotic in tone. But Haywood layers this amorous language onto Ciamara's physical body rather than her passions. In doing so, Haywood further cements Ciamara as an artificial object. Despite her "glorious" appearance, Ciamara has a corpulent quality to her person generated through the sheer amount of description and material goods Haywood grants her.

Ciamara's excessive appearance is matched by her excessive sexuality. At their first meeting, Ciamara is disguised as Camilla; meeting D'Elmont for the first time as herself, Ciamara is an affront to feminine virtue. Reclining on a couch in clothes "loose as wanton fancy could invent," Ciamara retains a falseness.[126] She is "affecting to seem as if she was not presently sensible of his being there," but she quickly lapses into aggressively sexual language.[127] Ciamara describes her lust as "this lavish prodigality of passion, which forces me

[125] Haywood, 207.

[126] Haywood, 223.

[127] Haywood, 223.

beyond my sexes pride."[128] In saying that her passion leads her to a certain action, Ciamara follows the logic of Haywood's worlds. Yet, Ciamara vocalizes her lust in a different manner from Melliora and other Haywoodian heroines because she shows no resistance to her feelings. "Is this an hour to preach of virtue?–Married,–betrothed,–engaged by love or law, what hinders but this moment you may be mine," she says to D'Elmont.[129] It is clear that Ciamara proposes only a sexual union, whereas D'Elmont had assumed she sought marriage: "it would be base to cheat with you a vain pretence," he has just informed her.[130] Unable to persuade him with words, Ciamara mobilizes her body: "she sunk supinely on D'Elmont's breast."[131] This physical contact "made him lose all the esteem" he had for her.[132] But she continues to speak "without reserve" and "lying on his breast, beheld, without concern her robes fly open."[133] Ciamara initiates the sexual aspects of this scene, and the preceding descriptions of her signal her sexuality through ornamentation.

Ciamara is the emblem of feminine excess, having exceeded the bounds of proper femininity with her externalized agency. Ballaster writes of Ciamara, "Ciamara's facility with amatory (self) representation, though in many ways presented as a peculiarly feminine mode of appropriation is, Haywood makes clear, at root a masculine identification."[134] That Ballaster reads Ciamara and Haywood in such gendered terms is critical to my understanding of action in

[128] Haywood, 223.

[129] Haywood, 224.

[130] Haywood, 223.

[131] Haywood, 224.

[132] Eliza Fowler Haywood, *Love in Excess: Or, The Fatal Enquiry*, ed. David Oakleaf, 2nd ed, Broadview Literary Texts (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2000), 224.

[133] Haywood, 225.

[134] Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 177.

amatory fiction. Ballaster describes Ciamara's personhood as "purely end-directed."[135] Ballaster understands this form of agency in masculine terms across Haywood's amatory works. "Haywood rejected, as a model of female empowerment, the possibilities of a female adoption of the self-interested and end-directed desire her novels consistently associate with masculinity." I conceptualize this orientation as externalization, so as to ground action in a process originating from the internal mechanisms of the passions. With this language, I do not intend to introduce anachronisms in reading the passions but preserve the fluidity of selves and complexities of feeling and action explored across eighteenth-century dialogues of the passions. Ciamara encapsulates the complexities of these dialogues in presenting a highly feminine affect and suffering suicide as a punishment. Ciamara is, in my reading, the model of feminine excess: a figure who, because of her overt femininity, is punished. Within *Love in Excess*, she represents the point at which a woman becomes *too* embodied. This point of excess or over-embodiment is not fixed. It is as nebulous as the concept itself because this moment is designed to restrain. Who requires restraining is dependent on the surroundings.

Haywood's structure reinforces the ambiguity of feminine excess seen in women's culture. *Love in Excess* occurs across three volumes, each volume offering a pair of women seeking D'Elmont's affections and a subplot between a friend of D'Elmont and another woman. In this way, the book offers the same story multiple times, with scenes of sexual temptation repeated within and across these retellings. This repetition is common to amatory fiction and constitutes a core aspect of its conventionality. Through this repetition, amatory fiction contradicts itself. Manley's *The Power of Love* (1720)—which Carnell argues Manley wrote in order to compete commercially with Haywood—is a collection of adapted stories. Most of these

[135] Ballaster, 177.

stories originate in English in William Painter's *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566). Within this collection, Manley includes *The Wife's Resentment* and *The Husband's Resentment*, the latter of which consists of two separate stories. To make these stories even less distinct, Haywood produced *Love in its Variety* (1727), a similar collection that proclaims itself to be a translation of Painter.[136] This is largely not the case, and the stories Haywood writes often bear little resemblance to Painter's stories. Amatory fiction, then, proclaims sameness but produces difference through its frenzied proliferation and repetitions. Scott Black describes the contradictory and paradoxical aspects of romance generally as "a series of strange loops."[137] These loops are purposeful within romance and amatory fiction specifically. "In the play between self-conscious adaptation and self-conscious adoption, romance achieves its characteristic formal shape, those productive tensions that recur at—and echo between—the levels of story, narrative, and history alike."[138]

The effect of romance's doubling is an embodied enactment of that which it seeks to expose. Black writes,

> The characteristic gesture of the genre is a double, post-critical move that critiques naive, innocent, or mistaken modes of reading but then provokes versions of those experiences, inviting us to participate in the strange loops of

[136] In "Sensible Readers: Experiments in Feeling in Early Prose Fictions by Women," Ros Ballaster considers the trend for variety in early eighteenth-century fictions. Ballaster, "Sensible Readers: Experiments in Feeling in Early Prose Fictions by Women."

[137] Scott Black, *Without the Novel: Romance and the History of Prose Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 20.

[138] Black, 49.

reading by which the extraordinary stories of romance are reinstalled as spaces of play.[139]

Amatory fiction specifically constructed this playfulness, a suspended mediation between fiction and reality generated in the appropriation of extant romantic and political forms and a novel emphasis on sensuous eroticism.

This playfulness, however, becomes less lighthearted when considered as an intimate public engaging in soft supremacy—Berlant's term for the subtle racial ideologies of women's culture. Playfulness, within the amatory public and later romances, threatens harm because of how playfulness upholds conventions as locations for subversive footholds. This playfulness, or intersection of convention and subversion, engenders intimacy and belonging in amatory fiction and women's culture. Intimacy becomes hyper-personalized due to this intrasubjective blend. An intimate public can weaponize its media under the guise of playful innocence or naivety, which Berlant deems soft supremacy. This deployment of playfulness within romance narrative undergirds the racializing of gender and is the subject of my subsequent chapters. An amatory example of play reinforcing violence comes in the work of Penelope Aubin.

Penelope Aubin, whose stories of intrigue are more stringently moral and didactic, has the heroine of *The Noble Slaves* (1722) tear her own eyes from their sockets in an attempt to escape rape at the hands of a Turkish man. Penelope Aubin adopts more conservative attitudes towards morality than Haywoodian fictions, insofar as she stringently upholds chastity within a paradigm more resembling chivalric romance. Aubin, whose popularity allegedly trailed only Defoe and Haywood in her own time, concocted her amatory tales through travel fictions. In the preface to *The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil and His Family* (1721), Aubin laments

[139] Black, 43.

how "serious things are in a manner altogether neglected by what we call the gay and fashionable" and consequently she turns to "methods where delight and instruction may go together."[140] In these prefaces, the fictionality of the tales is a frequent subject. Aubin writes, "since Robinson Crusoe has been so well received, which is more improbable, I know no reason why this should be thought a fiction."[141] Aubin's tales were, of course, fictional. Gollapudi describes when Maria removes her eyeballs in *The Noble Slaves* as an "outrageously sensational narrative moment" that "articulates Aubin's conception of female heroism as an almost surreally militant chastity."[142] While Aubin's fictions did not always reach this heightened frenzy of chastity, Aubin did cement herself as a pious author. To do so, Aubin squelches her heroines' sexual desires and uses the travel narrative as the structuring event that challenges her heroines. Purely through traveling to non-European lands, Aubin's heroines have "already transgressed the boundaries of domestic and marital space," as Gollapudi writes.[143] Gollapudi argues that Aubin's strict chastity within the travel genre is "strategically necessary." [144] Aubin's entire moral project is also strategic, to some degree. Sarah Prescott argues that Aubin's moralizing is a self-conscious construction aimed to protect her character and serve as a marketing tool. "It is to her credit," Prescott writes, "that her plan served her extremely well in financial terms and also in the reputation that posterity has assigned to her." Prescott underscores Aubin's commercial savviness and thus the centrality of persona construction for amatory authors. The general conception of Aubin as constructing a morally diligent alternative to Haywoodian romances illustrates the

[140] Penelope Aubin, "The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil and His Family," 114.

[141] Penelope Aubin, 115.

[142] Gollapudi, "Virtuous Voyages in Penelope Aubin's Fiction," 669.

[143] Gollapudi, 675.

[144] Gollapudi, 675.

cultural attitudes towards Haywood. As Ros Ballaster writes there was "a split between female-authored pious and didactic love fiction, stressing the virtues of chastity or sentimental marriage, and erotic fiction by women, with its voyeuristic attention to the combined pleasures and ravages of seduction."[145] While Haywood is historically noted for her commercial success, the popularity of "prostitute of the pen" gives way to the matronly pen, à la Aunt Jane.[146] While this binary may be true in the commercial presentation of authors, the same cannot be stated of readers, especially given the overlapping deployment of feminine excess within the love narrative. Prescott writes that "most of [Aubin's] novels include a providential plot, various shipwreck and captivity narratives as well as a thematic emphasis on seduction and amatory intrigue."[147]

With erotic moments clothed in didacticism, Aubin's narratives still provide an erotic experience for the reader, whose proclivities we cannot discern. Further, ironic readership, which is a cornerstone of women's culture, cannot be determined. Ironic self-aware meta moments abound in women's culture, as we'll see in my fifth chapter; the meta-awareness of this attachment imbues consumption with irony that purports to defy the conservatism of content like Aubin's. But, this subversion can be subversion within, rather than against the system. Consider the ironic 1980s intro to the incredibly heteronormative *Bachelor in Paradise* that is part of "Bachelor Nation." Bachelor Nation is its own intimate public within women's culture that originates from the *The Bachelor* reality show and developed from offshoots like *The Bachelorette* and *Bachelor in Paradise*. Contestants appear on various iterations, have romantic and platonic relationships across series and seasons, and then leverage these appearances into social media careers. Casual viewers and citizens of Bachelor Nation alike consume its media

[145] Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 33.
[146] Sarah Prescott, *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690-1740* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 86.
[147] Prescott, 50.

ironically. But, they are still subscribing—literally in the digital media age—to the heteronormative ideologies of Bachelor Nation. Bachelor Nation and amatory fiction share a simultaneous distance and proximity to normativity, narrativized through romance and contemporary notions of feminine excess.

Imagining the body

Scholarship has tended to read amatory fiction within Jürgen Habermas's public sphere theory. According to Habermas, the public sphere develops out of political and economic changes that in turn re-conceptualize personhood. The increased secularization and developing mercantile culture across Europe result in the construction of the bourgeoisie civil sphere. "This stratum of 'bourgeois,'" Habermas writes, "was the real carrier of the public, which from the outset was a reading public."[148] The notion of a burgeoning public sphere is a critical scholarly intervention that has shaped the intellectual history of the eighteenth-century. The public sphere emphasizes material power and class divides that scholars have found somewhat anachronistic.[149] In contrast, Lauren Berlant's intimate public model is less fixed. An intimate public can occur across media and audiences, and it attends more to identity shaping than civic power. Intimate public theory leans more towards a capitalist critique and thus better suits a critical race reading—as does the intimate public theory's centralization of affect theory. An intimate public traffics in affect, whereas the public sphere traffics in reason. Further, Berlant's reading of women's culture generates pathways into reading marginalized identity-making, in

[148] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, 10. print, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 23.

[149] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/466240.

contrast to Habermas's public sphere model. Amatory fiction, read as an origin for women's culture and the romance mode, shows how intimate publics spring from a plurality of suppressed voices and purports to maintain this unified dissonance. In contrast, Habermas's public sphere more overtly maintains allegiances to cultural cache and uniformity, grounded always in logic rather than feeling. The amatory aesthetic does not attempt uniformity. The logic of the affective aesthetic is its illogic and its ability to provide possibilities. In its proliferation, amatory fiction destabilizes language rather than provides a coherent structure.

In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997), Berlant elucidates the political atmosphere of Reagan-era politics and the genesis of neoliberalism. In doing so, Berlant establishes how, in their purview, the US political public sphere is "radically different" from the Habermasian model. According to Berlant, Habermas "portrays the intimate sphere of the European eighteenth century as a domestic space where persons produced the sense of their own private uniqueness, a sense of self which became a sense of citizenship only when it was abstracted and alienated in the nondomestic public sphere of liberal capitalist culture."[150] Whereas Habermasian-Eurpoean citizenship originates in the shared domestic space, Berlantian-American citizenship originates in individualism, though it is similarly tied to traditional family structures. They write, "the intimate public sphere of the U.S. present tense renders citizenship as a condition of social membership produced by personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere."[151] Citizenship in America is even more abstract and individualized, devoid of the moral sociability promulgated in the early eighteenth century. "No longer valuing personhood as something directed toward public life, contemporary

[150] Lauren Gail Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, Series Q (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 4–5.
[151] Berlant, 5.

nationalist ideology recognizes a public good only in a particularly constricted nation of simultaneously lived private worlds."[152] Within these differences, Berlant embeds America's "new nostalgia-based fantasy."[153] The inference is that Berlant would resist an affiliation between eighteenth-century British sociability and American women's culture of the nineteenth century onwards. And yet, amatory fiction's narrative entanglement of romance, philosophy, and politics develops a mass-mediated community that hits on these defining aspects of American citizenship: personal choice, inner life, and a nostalgia-inflected good life.

In offering a structuring mechanism for identity through a proprietary affective aesthetic, amatory fiction parallels the Berlantian intimate public. As to the notion of women's culture specifically, amatory fiction aligns insofar as its fictions provide more affective possibilities for its feminine readers. Eighteenth-century modes of reading differ massively from the culture of consumption that Berlant considers, again complicating the construction of the convention as outlined in the intimate public paradigm. Writing on the various literary scenes of the eighteenth-century, Abigail Williams illustrates the networked nature of reading. Even within the static, solitary space of the home, Williams argues, reading provided a virtual space for connections. Domestic spaces could be "a place that was both public and private, a site of intimacy and also of social display."[154] In describing reading at home in this way, Williams opens the potential affective possibilities of reading for women. Unlikely to access literature at coffee houses or university-centered literary clubs, the home—whether through letter writing or visits—was a critical access point for women. And also for men, as Williams points out. "The paradigm of the mixed group was an emblem of virtue and prosperity." The less prosperous could also benefit

[152] Berlant, 5.
[153] Berlant, 5.
[154] Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home*, 2018, 5, https://www.degruyter.com/doi/book/10.12987/9780300228106.

from the increased reading activities of middle and upper-class populations. Servants in the home or in workplaces could be privy to reading experiences. How could convention be scaffolded across such an array of people?

The image of the woman reader that circulates as a cautionary tale within the eighteenth century is thus a fiction. But this fiction is useful. The story she tells is one of a person embodied through the experience of reading. William Warner writes of how amatory fiction was the first example of mass entertainment and, critically, that it was offered to a general *ungendered* reader. "By developing the first formula fiction on the market, Behn, Manley, and Haywood invent a form of private entertainment that incites desire and promotes the liberation of the reader as a subject of pleasure."[155] The idea of "private entertainment" is useful only in describing an internal experience and not, as Williams informs us, a solitary experience. In providing an interior virtual space through a publicly shared medium, amatory fiction creates a further virtual network between readers. Describing the significance of variety in amatory fiction, Ros Ballaster writes, "Only through an exploration of the variety and variation of romantic story does the 'sensible' reader come to participate in a sociable community and recognize the sameness of the structure of mind."[156]

Amatory fiction consciously projects communal belonging through its form and content, although amatory fiction produces an imaginative space for cognitive processing of the passions in relation to individual belonging. Amatory fiction collectivizes affective responses through similarly hyperbolic, repetitive content that somehow coalesces the sincere, the satirical, and the political. Locke, as cited by Tierney-Hynes, writes "a Man who reads or hears with attention and

[155] William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, n.d., 93.

[156] Ballaster, "Sensible Readers: Experiments in Feeling in Early Prose Fictions by Women," 39.

understanding, takes little notice of the Characters, or Sounds, but of the *Ideas*, that are excited in him by them."[157] Amatory fiction offers readers the opportunity to luxuriate in its affective ideas. Eroticism becomes a pathway into the impasse of limited self-constructions in contemporary society. As subversions of convention, amatory fiction and femme memes challenge the telos of intimate publics as Berlant explains them.

Amatory fiction strives for embodied disembodiment in parallel with contemporaneous understandings of imagination, drawn from philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, John Locke, and Lord Shaftesbury. Although these philosophers approach both human identity and the imagination differently, they share an interest in the relationship between identity and imagination. Distinguishing between Hobbes and Locke—whom scholars turn to most frequently in understanding eighteenth-century philosophies of reading—Jonathan Lamb writes,

> The unity of Hobbes's person derives from the unity of Leviathan itself, the artificial man, represented by a single figure comprising what was once a multitude. The unity of Locke's derives from the ability of the person to disguise the discontinuities of self-consciousness and make it seem coherent.[158]

As material empiricists, Hobbes and Locke scaffold identity through an accumulation of sensory experiences. Identity—wherein identity is largely continuous with the more limiting concept of citizen—is generated through experiencing the passions acting upon one's consciousness. Locke writes, "Self is that conscious thinking thing […] which is sensible or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and is so concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness

[157] Tierney-Hynes, *Novel Minds*, 39.

[158] Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2015), 5, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315653235.

extends."[159] In this idea of being affected, Hobbes and Locke present a material understanding of self: there is some material entity that can be the receiving object of affect. Thus, as Lamb writes,

> Sense-impressions of things, stored as ideas, provide the stuff of consciousness and of the self that Locke's person claims to be; and for Hobbes they supply the imagination with what it needs to invent fictions of social and political union.[160]

James Noggle reads this empiricist construction of identity through the language of the insensible, or unfelt. "The ideological construction of 'the modern subject,' then, its self-transparency and conscious freedoms, relies on a productive, affective blank."[161] In being affectively blank, a person needs to be affected in order to generate an identity, itself a fiction.

With the empiricist imagining of identity as a fiction and consciousness as activated through the passions, the written text becomes a vehicle for affecting the imagination into cognition. Noggle writes, "the insensible cultivates a kind of openness to narrative possibility in British discourse of the long eighteenth century."[162] Narrative or language offers a structuring telos to identity. Rebecca Tierney-Hynes considers this relationship between text, identity, and romance. "The reader of romance represents the affective underpinnings of empiricist epistemology and eighteenth-century theories of the self."[163] Tierney-Hynes as well as Kathleen Lubey isolate amatory fiction's philosophical function because of its affecting qualities. Lubey

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[159] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 1995), 251.

[160] Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 5.

[161] James Noggle, *Unfelt: The Language of Affect in the British Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 192.

[162] Noggle, 195.

[163] Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, *Novel Minds: Philosophers and Romance Readers, 1680-1740*, Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Cultures of Print (Basingstoke : New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7.

writes, "Asked to engage their imaginations at once to feel sensible arousal and to contemplate its significance, readers are thought to emerge from erotic episodes newly attuned to their own capacities for self-determination in moral and social matters."[164] This deployment of erotic and impassioned imagery is dependent on the Lockean understanding of the mind as first encountering concepts affectively and visually. Scenes of excess spill over into the consciousness and demand a response. Using Locke as well as Joseph Addison's writing in the early eighteenth-century periodical *The Spectator*, Lubey explains, "the imagination, through acts of memory and of reading, constructs ideas of objects once seen by the eye."[165] Erotic texts provide access to the imagination through prompting sensory experiences by way of the written word.

Amatory fiction can mediate identity according to contemporary philosophy, because its eroticism grips the body and mind. "Whoever reflects on what passes in his own mind, cannot miss it," Locke writes, "and if he does not reflect, all the words in the world cannot make him have any notion of it."[166] The affective aesthetic of amatory fiction demands reflection. Erotic scenes lavish the body with sensory reactions that in turn require the cognition of the reader to sort through the ethical complexities surrounding the scene. Lubey writes,

> By granting readers virtual access to the desires and seductions of beautiful, psychologically sophisticated women characters, Haywood invents a specific type of eroticism—an amatory aesthetic—for creating the imaginative conditions that were thought to please and instruct in the literary culture of the period.[167]

[164] Lubey, *Excitable Imaginations*, 3.

[165] Lubey, 15.

[166] Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 92.

[167] Lubey, *Excitable Imaginations*, 106.

The amatory grammar of flourishing phrases, voyeuristic gazing, and breathless declarations underscore the erotic images themselves. The repetition within and across stories entrap a reader within a virtual space of affective intensity. Amatory fiction strives to be excessive in this way. If identity is a fiction, amatory fiction offers itself as the narrative structure for that identity.

The pitfalls of amatory potential

In its various ideological engagements, amatory fiction offers footholds for participating in cultural change. Framing romance narratives around women's eroticisms generated a literary genre from women authors, encouraged entertaining moral reflection in a medium more accessible than manuscript culture or replicable than theater, and created unfettered access to the political sphere through affective transport: all these innovative aspects invited the general reader to recognize the socio-political power of women. On one end of its progressive potential, amatory fiction buys time for the inexperienced woman, whose gender, age, or class status prohibits her from exploring intimacy and cultural politics. On the other end, the genre brought women to the frontlines of cultural and political engagement. "All women together ought to let flowers fall on the tomb of Aphra Behn [. . .] for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds," Virginia Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own*.[168] In the next sentence, Woolf calls Behn "shady and amorous."[169]

And yet, to read amatory fiction as only offering radical potential would be antithetical to the amatory fiction's own unwillingness to accept fixed cultural understandings. Over the years, scholarship and cultural renderings have shifted their readings of the genre. Janet Todd writes of Aphra Behn that "In her day, Behn had the reputation of a respected professional writer and also

[168] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2012), 49.
[169] Woolf, 49.

of a 'punk-poetess.' For a long time after her death, she was allowed only to be the second."[170] A few years after her first book on amatory fiction, Ros Ballaster wrote, "I overlooked the possibility that Haywood might be treating a masculine narrator satirically, a technique that I had noted in the work of Manley."[171] This statement comes from Ballaster's larger adjusted argument that augments Haywood's political interests. Previously reading Haywood as diluting Manley's political emphasis within the genre, Ballaster comes to argue that "Haywood's scandal fiction [is] both a shrewd critique of the gendered cultural and political poetics of the 1720s and 1730s and an attempt to 'configure' a rival aesthetics more hospitable to the imagining of agency for women as writers and political 'plotters.'"[172] Reframing amatory fiction within our digital world and contemporary discourses, such as critical race theory, is a natural evolution of scholarship writ large. I explore the limitations of the eighteenth-century romance form's radicalism from this current purview, while not discounting its past and present possibilities.

Like contemporary women's culture, amatory fiction promulgates commodified romance narratives oriented through normative women's erotic desire as the means for an affective social belonging that feels necessary for survival in a patriarchal world, but ultimately keeps its citizens mired within its hegemonic forces through the ambivalence aesthetic of feminine excess. Amatory fiction's development into an intimate public begins with the innovations already explored in this chapter. The genre's relationship to the developing literary marketplace and other modes and genres, such as satire and the novel, are equally significant influences on amatory fiction's commercial status.

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[170] Janet Todd, "The First English Woman to Make a Living as a Writer Was Also a Spy," *Literary Hub* (blog), August 7, 2017, https://lithub.com/the-first-english-woman-to-make-a-living-as-a-writer-was-also-a-spy/.
[171] Ros Ballaster, "A Gender of Opposition: Eliza Haywood's Scandal Fiction," in *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work*, ed. Kirsten T. Saxton and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 144.
[172] Ballaster, 144.

Prostitute of the pen

Following the codification of the novel with works such as Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, canonical readings of amatory fiction are preoccupied with how the genre relates to the novel. Renewed interest in amatory fiction occurred alongside the rise of feminist theory, resulting in gendered readings of amatory fiction as proto-novels. "[W]omen's role in the novels' rise has been underestimated," Cheryl Turner writes in *Living by the Pen*.[173] Ros Ballaster's *Seductive Forms* is exemplary of the feminist recuperation project.[174] In *Seductive Forms*, Ballaster describes amatory fiction in gendered terms: "women's writing" and "feminocentric" are common phrases. That being said, Ballaster takes issue with ascribing a gendered telos to the likes of Eliza Haywood's *Fantomina*. "Rage at patriarchal oppression is the 'truth' behind every woman's fiction and the feminist critic's job is to discover and uncover its strategies of concealment."[175] This language parallels the idea of the female complaint that is central to women's culture per Berlant. Much of the scholarship on amatory fiction considers how the female complaint as depicted through amorous feelings translates the political into a new mass media. Ballaster writes that "Behn and Manley seek to privilege the female writer as a political agent, precisely by virtue of her position at the margins of the political order."[176] Indeed, Behn was a political agent, operating unsuccessfully as a spy for Charles II; Manley's *The New Atalantis* lifted so much of its narrative from court gossip in the form of a secret history that

[173] Turner, *Living by the Pen*, viii.

[174] See Also Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986),

[175] Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 21.

[176] Ballaster, 3.

Manley was imprisoned for libel.[177] Amatory fiction traffics in the affect economy for moral and political ends; but, as commodities, these fictions are necessarily also embedded in an actual economy of the early literary marketplace.

The commercial nature of amatory fiction has received much consideration.[178] Ballaster takes seriously the notion of amatory fiction as a job and argues that the amatory author was a "prostitute of the pen, trafficking in her desire for her profit and, [was] in this respect, no different from many of her male contemporaries."[179] Paula McDowell likewise describes how amatory fiction was part of the larger male-dominated Grub Street commercial enterprise. The works of Grub Street authors were, McDowell writes, "characterized, by repetition, with variation, and this phenomenon may simply be traceable to these authors' socioeconomic position and historic moment in print culture."[180] Writing of Grub Street authors, McDowell explains, "these particular authors, none of who was classically trained, were highly indebted to a residual oral culture in which repetition, with variation was a commonplace structuring device."[181] Sarah Prescott helpfully describes how "writers like Haywood and Aubin can be seen to be somewhere between the lowly hacks and literary giants such as Pope."[182] Grub Street were the hacks, while Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift were the literati. Haywood, Manley, and others like Mary Davys positioned themselves as worthy authors, albeit with their gender in

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[177] Janet Todd collates Behn's various careers in her biography. Rachel Carnell explores Manley's politics in a politically-minded biography, as does Kathryn King for Eliza Haywood. Carnell, *A Political Biography of Delarivier Manley*; Kathryn King, *A Political Biography of Eliza Haywood* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012); Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn*.

[178] See Turner, *Living by the Pen*; Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820*.

[179] Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 29.

[180] McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street*, 247 n 51.

[181] McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street*, 247 n 51.

[182] Prescott, *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690-1740*, 110.

mind. And, these authors were successful in many ways in generating authorial personas that achieved commercial and literary success. "Behn, Manley, and Haywood reveal themselves to be far from separated by the imposition of an emergent philosophy of 'separate spheres' (politics and romance, masculine and feminine, the coffee-house and the boudoir)," Ballaster writes.[183] This is especially true of Mary Davys, who operated a coffee-house in Cambridge for a period of time.

In 1724, Davys published *The Reform'd Coquet*, a comical yet sinister example of amatory fiction. The eponymous coquet Amoranda receives news from her uncle and guardian that he has appointed a proxy guardian. The uncle requires a proxy because his work for the East India Company requires as much. Named Traffick, the wealthy uncle nods at Britan's global commercial exploitation; his name could also speak to his arranging for his niece's marriage. The chosen proxy has an equally conspicuous name, Formator; but, Formator is simply Alanthus in disguise. The uncle and Alanthus have previously arranged for Alanthus to marry Amoranda, on condition that he approves of Amoranda's character. Alanthus does *not* approve, so he uses the Formator character to reform Amoranda into his ideal wife. Alanthus's education involves restraining Amoranda's flirtatious tendencies and leading her to renounce her autonomy. Alanthus's means of education include subjecting Amoranda to a rape attempt. Ultimately, Amoranda marries Alanthus of her own tainted volition. Helen Thompson writes that the novel "stages a coquette's happy conversion into a subject wife only as a violation of the novel's truth."[184] With satire embedded in the framing of works like Delarivier Manley's autofiction *The Adventures of Rivella*, or through meta-awareness as in *Fantomina*, entire amatory works

[183] Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 29.
[184] Thompson, *Ingenuous Subjection Compliance and Power in the Eighteenth-Century Domestic Novel*, 21.

become projects of satirical skepticism. In turn, the appropriation of romance conventions becomes not simply a commercial exercise but a satirical act of subversion.

Coquet was only the second novel to be printed through subscription.[185] The list of subscribers includes a number of the peerage, and literary names such as John Gay, Alexander Pope, and Martha Blount.[186] This publishing method granted Davys more control over her novel's form, and it enabled her to write an unusual dedication. Most dedications paid homage to potential patrons, like royals and aristocrats of any gender. Davys's dedicates *Coquet*, however, "To the Ladies of Great Britain"—a general and femininized yet imagined audience. If one reads this book, is one automatically the subject of this address, and part of this broader community of readers? Davys displays the false humility and flattery typical in dedications. Describing her writing, she says that 'whatever my Faults may be, my Design is good, and hope you *British* Ladies will accordingly encourage it."[187] Davys both commends and critiques her community of readers. 'If I have here touch'd a young Lady's Vanity and Levity," she writes, regarding the content of *Coquet*, "it was to show her how amiable she is without those Blots," by which Davys means pandering to unworthy men.[188] Davys connects herself with the literary elite when she assures her ladies that they can overcome this vanity because "every body [is] (as a witty Gentleman has somewhere said) provided with a Racket to strike it from themselves." [189] Martha Bowden argues that Davys is referencing a line from Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of the Tub* that is irrelevant to vanity. [190] This reference reads like a purposeful misdirect that winks at their difficult relationship but nonetheless associate the two. Rather than attempting to gain favor with

[185] Bowden, Introduction, p. xxvii.

[186] Bowden, '*Self-Presentation* and the *Woman Writer's Reputation*', p. 26.
[187] Davys, *Coquet*, p. iv.
[188] Davys, *Coquet*, p. v.
[189] Davys, *Coquet*, p. v.
[190] Davys, *Coquet*, pp. vi-vii. ; Bowden, Appendix to *Coquet,* ed. Martha Bowden, p. 231, note 2.

Swift, this unrelated reference to his text seems to function more like her Latin epigram: a knowingly false indication of intimacy that perhaps acknowledges and mocks her feminine pen and her and Swift's difficult relationship (Davys's long-deceased husband was a classmate of Swift's and the two remained acquainted until Mr. Davys's death). Davys aggrandizes her false modesty and authorial claims in her preface, written to the men of Cambridge who purportedly frequented her coffee-house and encouraged her writing. She writes that "*it was not to the Book, but the Author, they subscribed. They knew her to be a Relict of one of their Brotherhood, and one, who (unless Poverty be a Sin) never did any thing to disgrace the Gown.*[191] Her innately gendered position of widowhood demands pity, *and* ingratiates her with a learned community. Her gender becomes her access to her authorship.

Making grandiose literary claims was in part a response to the negative connotations of women earning money in a public way—recall again Pope's whoring out of Eliza Haywood in *The Dunciad*. But the originators of amatory fiction used this misogyny to their advantage. "Their experimental texts dramatize the seduction of the female reader by amatory fiction, exploring alternatives that offer models for the female victim to come to 'mastery' of or resistance to the fictional text through the figure of the heroinized female writer," Ballaster writes.[192] This delicate balance, which Mary Davys's prefatory materials to *The Reform'd Coquet* neatly captures, is not dissimilar to the ambivalence of women's culture.

Davys set her eyes on grander literary success with the 1725 publication of *The Works of Mrs. Davys*. In the 1720s, men were the primary authors of collected editions—and they were often dead. Joseph Congreve in 1710 and Alexander Pope in 1717 were unusual in publishing their collected works while still alive. "The publication of an author's *Works* was a choice

[191] Davys, *Coquet*, pp. x-xi.
[192] Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 30.

freighted with cultural significance in the 1720s," writes Al Coppola.[193] Davys was not the only amatory author to do so, though there was little precedent. Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn were collected posthumously in *Poems by the most deservedly Admired Mrs. Katherine Philips (*1667*)* and *All the Histories and Novels Written by the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn* (1698). As for the living, Jane Barker published *The Entertaining Novels of Mrs. Jane Barker* in 1717. Eliza Haywood published two collections: *The Works of Mrs. Eliza Haywood* in 1724 and *Secret Histories, Novels and Poems* in 1725. This second collection, printed in more portable duodecimo scale, presents a more alluring authorial identity compared to her first collection. Commercial appeal *and* literary standing were important. "Authorising one's 'works' was above all an assertion of artistic power and entitlement, an attempt to place one's own productions in a literary patrilineage extending from Ben Jonson," Coppola writes. [194] Doing so as an unabashed scandal writer awakens the feminine side of the literary patrilineage.

In her preface to her collected works, Davys continues the trend of amatory authors dousing their authorial persona with an ironic tone, while blurring the lines of genre. Davys writes "*that those Sort of Writings call'd* Novels *have been a great deal out of Use and Fashion*."[195] This is not the case: Cheryl Turner states that female-authored novels had "a steady, rapid rise in output reaching a peak around 1725."[196] Davys's false claim is predicated on the fact that '*the Ladies (for whose Service they were chiefly design'd) have been taken up with Amusements of more Use and Improvement; I mean History and Travels*."[197] Again, this

[193] Coppola, 'The Secret History of Eliza Haywood's *Works*: The Early Novel and the Book Trade', *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, 19 (2012), 133–61 (p. 148).
[194] Coppola, p. 149.
[195] Davys, *Works*, I, p. iii.
[196] Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 38.

[197] Davys, *Works*, p. iii.

comment generates a community for the reader, and again, Davys offers improvements for the media her reader typically consumes. Davys promises more than those old, repetitive, endless French novels. Those romances *"lose the only Advantage of Invention, which gives us room to order Accidents better than Fortune will be at the Pains to do; so to work upon the Reader's Passions, sometimes keep him in Suspence between Fear and Hope, and at last send him satisfy'd away*." She, like her contemporaries, offers a narrative whose innovation is in the more personal domain of the passions. Paradoxically, this personal space is accessed through fiction. The other, unspoken paradox is that of the author's commercial interest. Davys defends her need "*to catch at any Opportunity for that Bread*." She, like her contemporaries, are selling the promise of intimacy with the self through a shared experience.

Reading Davys and amatory fiction as structuring an intimate public has scholarly precedent. William Warner writes, "The novels of amorous intrigue are an early instance of what I will call 'media culture,' provisionally defined within the eighteenth-century context as the practices of production and consumption associated with print media."[198] But Warner explicitly refutes "reading the novels of amorous intrigue backwards from the contemporary Harlequin romance, so as to situate them as an early instance of women's popular culture."[199] He delineates the barriers between the amatory genre and women's culture as follows:

> I have noted several fundamental problems with interpreting Behn, Manley, and Haywood as instances of women's popular culture: first, their novels are not cast in the form of an address to a woman reader; second, although the author is

[198] William Warner, *Licensing Entertainment* (University of California Press, 1998), 93.
[199] Warner, 90.

> sometimes figured as a woman, she is not consistently feminist; and third, there is no evidence that the early modern print market was segmented by gender.[200]

The first claim, as Davys preface showed us, is not consistently true. Even when not decidedly addressed to an audience of women, amatory fiction is infused with feminine perspectives. "The feeling character with whom we sympathize in these fictions is explicitly gendered," Ballaster writes.[201] Warner's second claim is, in my argument, the exact aspect of amatory fiction that makes it a part of women's culture. Amatory fiction is feminist insofar as it wheedles agency where it can, at times to the detriment of other women—and thus, as I explore in my ensuing chapters, foreshadows our modern white feminism. Warner's third claim is somewhat irrelevant, in my opinion. This is because the model citizen of women's culture is imagined. While the demographic that consumes media is important, the larger cultural assumption of who consumes that media and the social associations of that consumption are significant. Amatory scholars have used the term "women's writing," which Warner defines as when "a female author writes as a woman for other women, reflecting upon, and sometimes contesting, life within patriarchy."[202] I would amend this notion to describe women's writing as women engaging with the romance form, with feminism having become a central concern as the form became increasingly gendered over the centuries.

The question of amatory fiction's feminism is at the heart of its relationship to women's culture. Davys's *Coquet* exemplifies the eventual feminism of women's culture that wields normative femininity for survival. This amatory subversion, *Coquet* shows, is not necessarily progressive in terms of generating change that offers greater agency to others, but rather is an

[200] Warner, 121.
[201] Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 35.
[202] Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, 89.

individualistic tool for claiming agency that is only available to certain women. At first, the domestic space of *The Reform'd Coquet* seems to be a feminocentric landscape where wit abounds and the coquet exposes her suitors. The home and gardens are for Amoranda a safe haven from the wider and wilder countryside blooming with dark irony and violent threats of kidnapping and rape. Amoranda's wealth and standing seemingly protect her from this infiltration of unwanted men; but, this fallacy is exposed, and the underlying patriarchal nature of the feminocentric space is revealed. In recompense, Davys offers the imaginative space of fiction as a safe haven for women.

Each half of the novel has a central kidnapping and rape attempt: in the first half, two foolish suitors attempted to kidnap Amoranda in her home; in the second, a suitor uses a woman's disguise to lure Amoranda away from her guardian into the woods and nearly rapes her. The first kidnapping event begins and ends with Amoranda's wit. To summarize her attitude towards her suitors, Amoranda quips to one of them before the kidnapping attempt: "Your Estates …. I wonder you shou'd name it; 'tis trifling indeed compared to your Merit."[203] Amoranda's female housekeeper overhears the gentlemen in Amoranda's summer-house developing their scheme and alerts her mistress. "Madam, *said she*, if your Ladyship be at Leisure, I have a Secret of great Importance to communicate with you."[204] In the housekeeper's phrasing the potential kidnapping in the summer-house is little more than entertainment for Amoranda. Amoranda is safe within her home. Amoranda plans to lure her suitors to the summer-house, whereupon her footmen will surprise attack them disguised as her and her

[203] Mary Davys, "The Reform'd Coquet; or Memoirs of Amoranda," in *The Reform'd Coquet; or Memoirs of Amoranda and Familiar Letters Betwixt a Gentleman and a Lady and The Accomplish'd Rake, or a Modern Fine Gentleman*, ed. Martha F. Bowden (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 19.
[204] Davys, 23.

maidservant and to then beat them. "[W]ell since the worthy Gentlemen have begun such a Scheme, I'll throw in my Counter-plot among them, and see who will come best off."[205]

Amoranda is much closer to danger later on, after a woman named Berintha enters her home on the arm of Amoranda's good friend. The three take a boat trip, upon which Berthina reveals she is in fact Biranthus, a violent suitor who has already attempted to kidnap Amoranda from her carriage in the middle of a trip once before. Amoranda refuses Biranthus, who has turned some of Amoranda's men against her. The scene quickly escalates, as the female friend who brought Biranthus into the home dies and Birnathus tells Amoranda to "tremble at thy approaching Fate. This minute, by the help of thy own Servant, I will enjoy thee; and then, by the assistance of my Arm, he shall do so too."[206] Amoranda is rescued, eventually. A gentleman appears—the suitor Alanthus, who has been disguising himself as an old man to play the role of Formator, Amoranda's guardian. Alanthus appears, only to tell Amoranda, "I am no Knight Errant" and to ride off, leaving Amoranda with her would-be-rapist. When "her shrill Cries filled the Air," Alanthus returns to rescue Amoranda.[207] After Formator is revealed to be Alanthus, he explains his behavior:

> I knew it would give you double terror, to see a prospect of relief, then find your self abandon'd; and I likewise knew, the greater your fear was then, the greater your care wou'd be for the future, to avoid such enterprizes: but I had yet a view in favour of my self, and had reason to believe, the greater your deliverance was, the greater value wou'd you set upon your deliverer.[208]

[205] Davys, 24.
[206] 59.
[207] 60
[208] 80.

Amoranda admits that this plan worked: She says, "the additional service you did me in the Wood, gave you a very good title to a Heart which I thought you greatly worthy of."[209]

Both through the attempted rape and her lessons from her guardian, Amoranda comes to desire marriage with Alanthus and believe she has chosen him as a husband, when their entire relationship has been previously arranged. Alanthus admits, "I thought you would be more open and free, in declaring your real Sentiments of everything to me, as I was, than as I am."[210] Amoranda is aware that she has been manipulated, and yet she accepts Alanthus largely because her uncle helped design the plot against her.

While recognizing the reality of woman's conscription into the sexual contract through the infiltration of Alanthus, Davys extends an alternative space for women to thrive: the fictional, imaginative space. The novel's association with imagination is driven through the female characters. After Formator's unmasking, Lady Betty, Alanthus's sister, arrives at the estate. Amoranda requests that Alanthus re-disguise—continue the fiction—so Amoranda can toy with Lady Betty. Amoranda asks him to "put on your disguise once more, that I may have the pleasure of seeing your own Sister as much deceiv'd as I have been."[211] Upon Formator removing his beard and transforming into Alanthus, Lady Betty says, "she thought herself in some inchanted Castle, and all about her Fiends and Goblins."[212] Alanthus encourages this thought, sharing that, "This, my dear Sister, is the *Fairy-Land* where I have so long Liv'd Incognito, and there, there's the Inchantress, who by a natural Magick, has kept me all this while in Chains of Love."[213] Alanthus rewrites Amoranda as the ruler of the estate, even though her uncle returns as this scene

[209] 78
[210] 79

[211] Davys, "The Reform'd Coquet; or Memoirs of Amoranda," 82.
[212] Davys, 83.
[213] Davys, 83.

unfolds. Alanthus does so, however, within the imaginative landscape; Amoranda retains power not in the material world but in the imaginative world, in which harmless wit is safe from dark irony.

Seemingly divorced from state politics in comparison to more explicit works like Manley's *The New Atalantis*, *The Reform'd Coquet* follows in the wake of amatory fiction's incorporation of politics into its aesthetic of excess. This dynamic is a critical origin for the juxtapolitical nature of women's culture and emerges from the seventeenth-century understanding of passive obedience.

Passively political

A religious and political doctrine, passive obedience became a popular literary trope in response to the Restoration era's crisis of authority. Heroic tragedy in particular drew upon passive obedience as a means of discussing the Exclusion Crisis and royal succession.[214] Contemporary understanding, especially amongst absolutists, still viewed the monarchy as the result of divine right. Consequently, to contest the ruling monarch was to contest God.[215] Passive obedience allows an individual to contest the divine right of the monarchy via affective and metaphorical resistances. Passive obedience makes a display of the minutiae of obedience and declares that obedience not given with full heart and head is incomplete. In its various dramatizations, such as John Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* (1672), passive obedience to

[214] The Exclusion Crisis (1679-1681) was a legal conversation regarding the ascension of King James II while his brother Charles II still reigned. The event resulted in the formation of the Tory and Whig parties, with the former representing more aristocratic and country interests as compared to the Whiggish sensibility of sociability. Though not necessarily wedded to King James II and his Catholicism in the same manner as Jacobites, Tories held a royalist perspective that made the notion of passive obedience an appealing paradigm.

[215] Elizabeth Walters, "Gender and Civil War Politics in Margaret Cavendish's 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity,'" *Early Modern Women* 8 (Fall 2013): 215.

the English monarch takes the form of uprisings against foreign tyrants. Authors often displaced their narratives to a foreign setting to exaggerate the actions of their characters. Indeed, foreign revenge stories had been popular since Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedie* (1592). The villainy of foreign tyrants was often magnified through not only military violence but also domestic violence and sexual assault against women. Dryden's work dissolves the dilemma of confronting a ruler through casting him as a foreign tyrant and rapist whose intolerable behaviors demand retribution but who succumbs in a secondary plot that absolves the hero from directly committing a violent act of regicide. Bridget Orr writes, "As a genre, the heroic plays attempted a reconciliation between the aristocratic mode of heroic romance and the epic celebration of kingship and empire associated with absolutist monarchy."[216] Passive obedience in drama reconciled the heroic romance's ethos of exceptionalism and contemporary concerns regarding monarchial power and succession. As a form of protest that evaded explicit insubordination, passive obedience became a mechanism for espousing personal views and political allegiances while also upholding one's religious and monarchal morals. As the Restoration moved further into the past, the trope nonetheless continued, albeit with different stakes. As "the right to *resist* faded," Brett Wilson writes, "the right to *oppose* endured."[217]

Amatory fiction uses sexual assault against the heroine as a metaphor for begrudging political consent, politicizing the aesthetic of feminine excess. In *The Accomplish'd Rake*, Sir John Galliard drugs and rapes Miss Friendly, the daughter of a family friend. Miss Friendly becomes pregnant and, having no memory of her assault, is socially ostracized. Eventually, John

[216] Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 136.

[217] Brett D. Wilson, *A Race of Female Patriots: Women and Public Spirit on the British Stage, 1688-1745*, Transits: Literature, Thought & Culture, 1650-1850 (Lewisburg [Pa.]: Bucknell University Press, co-published with The Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Group, 2012), 213 n 37.

confesses to Miss Friendly. The pair marry, only after Miss Friendly finagles herself a financial stake in John's estate for the child and has the child declared his full heir. Miss Friendly is helpless against superior physical forces; but she remains committed to her superior ethics. The novel informs us that, contrary to social suspicion, Miss Friendly's virtue never wavered because she did not engage willingly in sex. Miss Friendly's submission to a greater power ultimately grants her financial control she may not otherwise have, in addition to a reformed husband. Staying steadfast to one's principles, or acting passively obedient, will eventually lead to social reward. Such sexual dynamics also nuanced virtue by framing chastity alongside consent. In Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*, Count D'Elmont and Melliora have a sexually charged encounter. Yet, the narrative does not punish Melliora because, once again, Melliora is not aware of the situation. D'Elmont steals into Melliora's room with nefarious intentions. He discovers her dreaming, and the narrator informs us that Melliora's dreams are about D'Elmont. Reality and dreams coalesce, as D'Elmont begins to take advantage of Melliora's unconscious state.

> Melliora in spite of her self, was often happy in idea, and possest a blessing, which shame and guilt, deterred her from in reality. Imagination at this time was active, and brought the charming Count much nearer than indeed he was, and he, stooping to the bed, and gently laying his face close to her's, (possibly designing no more than to steal a kiss from her, unperceived) that action, concurring at that instant, with her dream, made her throw her arm (still slumbering) about his neck, and in a soft and languishing voice, cry out, "Oh D'Elmont, cease, cease to charm, to such a height and—Life cannot bear these

raptures. —And then again, embracing him yet closer, and—O! Too, too lovely Count—extatick ruiner!"[218]

Melliora's body announces its desire for D'Elmont. Melliora, though, remains unscathed in the narrative. Even though D'Elmont, "with such a tumultuous eagerness!," is half-naked and forcing himself on Melliora, Melliora's virtue remains intact.[219] Ros Ballaster writes that, "Haywood's heroines, though ruined, are 'innocent' because of their inability to resist sexual passion."[220] Haywood protects her through a secondary character disturbing the scene, a character whose open desire for D'Elmont sends her to a convent. Ciamara's over-the-top sexuality later serves to minimize Melliora's erotic desire.

These two examples from Davys and Haywood map onto "collusive resistance," the term Toni Bowers applies to amatory fiction that feminizes passive obedience. Collusive resistance, in Bowers's framing, is "a model for subordinate agency" and "a paradoxical exercise of *resistance through submission*."[221] In Bowers' reading, collusive resistance typically envisages passive obedience from a "tory-oriented" perspective, thereby enacting a model of virtue that views Hanoverian and Whiggish allegiances with skepticism.[222] Bowers' argument elucidates the ideological stakes of seduction; rape, as Bowers makes clear, enables a metaphorical space for political exigencies.[223] Here, Wilson's registering of the continuation of passive obedience with

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[218] Eliza Fowler Haywood, *Love in Excess, or, The Fatal Enquiry*, ed. David Oakleaf, 2nd ed, Broadview Literary Texts (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2000), 116.

[219] Haywood, 117.

[220] Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 170.

[221] Toni Bowers, *Force or Fraud: British Seduction Stories and the Problem of Resistance 1660-1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

[222] Bowers, 20.

[223] Helen Thompson's *Ingenuous Subjection* presents a similarly complex argument on agency, wherein women in domestic novels of the century claim the Lockean agency otherwise denied them through their (un)willingness to engage in marital contracts.

different aims informs Bowers' reading of amatory fiction. Decades after the Restoration, amatory fiction pursued passive obedience because of how it allowed authors to depict a method of surviving within a patriarchal system. In so doing, political consent becomes a matter of individual will. As, too, does virtue because amatory narratives lionize a woman's psychic attachment to the socio-cultural concept of virtue rather than the physical, virginal meaning. That a woman *feels* herself to be virtuous can be more important than what others believe. In this formulation, virtue becomes something that a woman can retain and self-generate without traditional markers of virtue like virginity or class power.

The eighteenth-century present

Amatory fiction, with its imaginative belonging and generic subversion, establishes the romance form as a media technology that mediates personal and cultural desires, whether those desires are hegemonic or counterhegemonic, progressive or conservative. Paradoxically, the tensions of this mediation develops the comfort of the romance form, from amatory fiction onwards. Amatory fiction establishes the precedent of the romance form allowing readers to have their cake and eat it too: engage and refuse erotic behavior, explore and avoid state politics, abscond and return to heteronormative gender. One can, through romance and its irony, be both within and against the system; an agent of change and a subject protected under cultural norms. This dynamic is comfortable because it assures a reader that she can navigate the ethical dilemma of erotic longing in a world that prizes social chastity. Reading a shared story, the reader realizes others, too, face this dilemma. Amatory fiction and the romance form, as I will continue to explore, not only offers a momentary salve in reading but also develops an imitable model for survival because of the persistent valorizing of feminine passivity within an aesthetic

of excess. Triangulating state and gender politics alongside philosophies of feeling, identity, and gender, amatory fiction politicizes passivity into an ethical and necessary model for survival. Amatory fiction begets the myth that the romance form still tells its readers: the dangers of heteropatriarchal desire are so forcefully imposed that *feeling* is the woman's only recourse for claiming agency. Because these dangers are relentless, a persistent method for passive feeling is necessary. That method is found in a romantic marital union, which subsumes a woman's agency.

In these affective orientations, amatory fiction generates an intimate public and originates the juxtapolitical nature of women's culture. The notion of the romance form as a media technology does not preclude amatory fiction from functioning as an intimate public. Rather, the two concepts are interrelated: the technology engenders the intimate public of women's culture. The technology is the backend of the affective and frontfacing intimate public. My reading of amatory fiction alongside the intimate public has located in amatory fiction an origin point of the political affect that is central to women's culture. Women's culture is such a broad notion—which is useful to some degree, as the broadness of an intimate public is partially the point. But, as we've seen with amatory fiction and our *Bachelor* excursus, there are so many points of access within specific media and genres. To recur endlessly to the broader intimate public notion minimizes historical and media particularities. The concept of the romance form places the intimate public model alongside genre analysis to cleave women's culture into dissectible events that, like amatory fiction tales, still collapse into each other to tell a larger story. Amatory fiction becomes a genre of a moment within which other genres of the romance form existed, offering overlapping but not identical venues of women's culture. Theatre, for example, is another critical venue of women's culture that is contemporary to amatory fiction.

Similarly, *The Bachelor* reality dating shows and normie memes opining a lackluster dating life exist in the same continuum of women's culture but are also their own intimate publics with particular citizenry. Writing on material much closer to the era of reality TV and memes than amatory fiction, Berlant observes that in women's culture, "Love is the gift that keeps on giving when people can rely on re-experiencing their intimates' fundamental sympathy with the project of repetition and recognition, no small feat since the terms of that sympathy are constantly shifting internally just as they are renegotiated in the world."[224] The romantic dyads of amatory fiction, as I have touched upon, require a sympathetic connection. The centrality of sympathy in the romance form truly comes to prominence, however, in the ensuing decades, as I explore in my next chapter.

[224] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 15.

Chapter 2: Gaslight; or, The Regulated Violence of Sympathy

By the 1730s, amatory fiction had fallen out of vogue. But, the romance form persisted, only wearing a different guise to entice readers. The sentimental romance genre, imbued with rhetoric of sentimentalism, comes to orient the romance form for the following decades; as the long eighteenth century comes to a close, the domestic genre emerges as the latest iteration of the romance form.

Each genre incorporates and disavows its romantic lineage and restructures eroticism in terms of contemporary epistemologies. But all these epistemologies are attempts to tame sexual desire—because as a natural and irremovable yearning, desire threatens man-made social structures such as patriarchal inheritance. Just as "genre" is our scholarly attempt to contain literature, these romance genre's depictions of eroticism are attempts to contain eroticism itself. The overarching mechanism for doing so within the romance form is to stage eroticism within the affective paradigm of sympathy. Sympathy individualizes eroticism, for better and worse.

Sociability, sensibility, sentimentality, sympathy—all were popular tropes and philosophies of the eighteenth-century, with overlapping concerns and timeframes. Sociability is a materialist conceit for civic virtue born in the early century. Sensibility is the ability to access feelings and their potential virtues, whereas sentimentality is largely a literary trope that gains popularity in mid-century and becomes laughable as the century ends. Sympathy is most integral to sentimentality. Nonetheless, in its broader sense of relating through shared perspective and attitude, sympathy is central to these various eighteenth-century notions. Indeed, sympathy extends far past the eighteenth-century and into our neoliberal reality, in Britain and America. Scholars—like Lauren Berlant and Saidiya Hartman—emphasize the sentimentalism of

nineteenth-century American media and its racecraft. But, again, in the eighteenth-century British conception, sentimentalism is a rhetoric, and sympathy is its embodiment.

The body's ability to display virtue continues to be a central trope in sentimental novels like Samuel Richardson's seminal *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), an epistolary novel following a young maid's attempts to protect her virtue from her lecherous employer. And yet, the interiority of characters emerges as the critical location for the moral dilemmas and identity-making of the romance form. By comparison, amatory fiction's deployment of excess is more obviously attached to materialism. Thought is externalized in dialogue; characters' appearances and commodities say all we need to know about their morality; action takes place on the spatial plane between bodies. Even on a formal level, materialism abounds as inset narratives rupture the narrative frame and plots develop through characters finding themselves in the same scene. Sentimentalism, however, doubles-down on cognitive reasoning as the antidote to the passions and consequently embeds the reader more intimately within characters' perspective. Empiricism, rather than materialism, is the rhetoric's epistemology. A common formal consequence of sentimentalism is that one character is prioritized and emerges as *the* main character, in whose interiority the reader is embedded. This evolving reader-character dynamic shares the grounding moral feeling of sentimentalism: sympathy. Rendered empirical through sentimentalism, sympathy becomes even more of an internal dynamic than in amatory fiction, as do erotic desire and ethical understanding. Characters like Richardson's Pamela and Haywood's Betsy Thoughtless must wield sentimental rhetoric to reveal an ethically sentimental interiority that allows them to achieve their romantic fates.

With a conceit of sentimental eroticism, the eighteenth-century sentimental novel paradoxically brings the individual into relief against the social, only to enforce the individual's

interiority as a gatekeeper of social economics. The more immediate social economic concern for authors and readers, however, is that the sentimental romance becomes *too* consumable, *too* fashionable, *too* accessible, *too* much. As the century ends, the romance form becomes skeptical of feelings, in a way. In the backdrop of imperialistic growth and costly warfare, the romance form enters a new era, changing toward what might be thought of as the domestic romance genre. This genre's narrative seemingly sits even closer to its characters' interiority, in part through its skeptical epistemology. This epistemology, which helps produce the domestic genre's reputation for realism, is most evident in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The domestic genre adapts the ethical and sympathetic notion of intimacy from its sentimental and amatory predecessors. But with its skeptical epistemology, the domestic's eroticism aggrandizes individual agency as narrative action and is increasingly transposed to interiority. Neither Elizabeth nor the reader can quickly see that Wickham is a rake, as would have been the case in earlier romance genres; she must harness her intellectual gifts against her own perspective, his public presentation, and the perspectives of others.

Throughout the epistemological and formal alterations in the romance form, sympathy is the constant affective orientation not only for the heroine and her suitors but also the reader. The interiority of the romance novel reinforces the reader's sympathetic connection with the heroine. This unilateral connection reflects the contemporary philosophies of sympathy, a major topic of conversation throughout the eighteenth century. Lord Shaftesbury, Adam Smith, and David Hume were all central figures in this conversation, which was closely linked to the Britain's economic philosophies. That Adam Smith wrote the canonical capitalist text *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and was a major contributor to philosophies of feeling is no coincidence.

In this chapter, I consider how the romance form deploys a mode of sympathy that is linked to the developing capitalist system. This sympathy operates in a hierarchal manner so as to become a fetishized commodity within an affective economy. The romance form enforces this commodification in its own circulations and supports a gendering of sympathy wherein women achieve sympathetic status through passivity and victimhood. Sympathy operates as the gatekeeping affect of the romance form, with the sympathy contract demarcating the boundaries of identification.

The sympathy contract

I take the phrase "sympathy contract" from Xine Yao and her analysis of unfeeling in the nineteenth-century American cult of sentimentality. In *Disaffected*, Yao reads the nineteenth-century American literary trend as generated from eighteenth-century European enlightenment culture and its emphasis on proper feeling. Yao writes,

> Eighteenth-century Enlightenment racism locked the coloniality of sympathy into national projects and the understanding of the global; the nineteenth-century sentimental project consolidated that formulation of sympathy into the liberal logics of belonging and political action.[225]

My concern is obviously with the pre-history that Yao assumes, specifically within romance novels. Yao reads sympathy as the structuring dynamic in the colonial project of proper feeling—which resonates with Berlant's "true feeling" of women's culture[226]. Yao describes the "unspoken social contract of sympathy" that affectively orients individuals into racialized and sexualized

[225] Yao, *Disaffected*, 14.
[226] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 6.b

citizenship.[227] Sympathy is an enduring affective component of Anglo-American romance novels, beginning with amatory fiction.

The specific definition of sympathy I use is derived from Adam Smith and his construction of sympathy as an empathetic relation generated through imagining another's experience. At its broadest level, sympathy is "fellow-feeling with any passion whatever," Smith writes in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).[228] This fellow-feeling, though incited through an individual relating their experience, truly begins in the spectator's imagination. "[I]t is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations."[229] Within the imagination, the spectator envisions a scene but from the perspective of their own emotional history. This is because of the limits of the imagination, which affords us access to "impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy."[230] Sympathy thus operates most successfully when familiar experiences and feelings are trafficked. Because of the limits of our imaginations and experiences, Smith fashions sympathy into a mode of storytelling, wherein a person tailors their tale of sympathy to their audience. This sympathetic storytelling begins with the teller "lowering his passions to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him."[231] At the same time that they modulate their own relation to their experience, the storyteller ideally relates extraordinary details. The spectator requires "every little circumstance of distress" and "all [the] minutest incidents" in order to sympathize deeply.[232] In such descriptions, Smith turns the person sharing their experience into a composer or narrator. Yet, this sympathetic narrator necessarily lacks originality because, in Smith's

[227] Yao, *Disaffected*, 3.
[228] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13.
[229] Smith, 11.
[230] Smith, 11–12.
[231] Smith, 219.
[232] Smith, 26.

conception, sympathy is inherently circular and static. This is because of how sympathy depends upon the spectator's extant faculties. A spectator finds an affective point with which to resonate; that point of sympathetic resonance is pre-existing and identifiable for the spectator.

The circularity of sympathy functions to confirm as sympathetic what is socio-culturally approved as such. Describing an aesthetic and moral sympathy, Smith writes, "wherever his sentiments entirely correspond with our own, we ascribe to him the qualities of taste and good judgment."[233] Smith's sympathy pivots on a confirmation bias rooted in pre-existing similarities, rather than a sympathy willing to learn and feel across difference. Lubey explains how for Smith, "our fellow-feeling is raised more readily by passions and people with whom we are familiar than by physical sensation, which is too particular to be approximated by another."[234] Smith's sympathy is an affective harmonizing with the familiar, and as such re-constitutes the spectator's socio-cultural affective relations. In describing sympathy through these terms of the narratively familiar, and equating sensible taste and judgment with the spectator's, Smith conceptualizes sympathy as an affectively comfortable experience. Sympathy does not ask partakers to challenge their familiar experiences, but reconfirm them. Comfort articulates the pleasure that Smith sees in sympathy, no matter the content. "But whatever may be the cause of sympathy, or however it may be excited, nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our breast; nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary."[235] Even if sharing a traumatizing experience that is re-ignited through the sharing, an individual finds sympathetic comfort in sharing. As, too, does the spectator because for both

[233] Smith, 24.
[234] Kathleen Lubey, *Excitable Imaginations: Eroticism and Reading in Britain, 1660-1760*, Transits : Literature, Thought & Culture (Lewisburg : Lanham, Md: Bucknell University Press : Co-published with The Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Group, 2012), 217.
[235] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 17.

parties, sympathy is an experience of community. Lubey writes, "Sympathetic acts of the imagination are tantamount to a subject's participation in community and society, since through such acts we join in shared feeling."[236] Sympathy is *fellow*-feeling, with the double meaning of fellow speaking to the parallelism of sympathy that engenders a fellowship. And this sympathetic fellowship is, according to Smith, one of the highest virtues humans can achieve.

> And hence it is, that to feel much for others and little for ourselves, that to restrain our selfish, and to indulge our benevolent affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature; and can alone produce among mankind that harmony of sentiments and passions in which consists their whole grace and propriety.[237]

Though Smith advocates here for diminishing the self through sympathy, his descriptions indicate the impossibility of this, as well as the innately selfish aspect of this supposedly utilitarian virtue. Speaking of the effect of sympathy, Smith writes, "Society and conversation, therefore, are the most powerful remedies for restoring the mind to its tranquility, if, at any time, it has unfortunately lost it; as well as the best preservatives of that equal and happy temper, which is so necessary to self-satisfaction and enjoyment."[238] Here we can see the direct links between the earlier notion of sociability and the increasingly popular sympathy. Sympathy, in Smith's estimation, *is* society and conversation. And as society, sympathy provides a comfortable experience that upholds extant affective relations, including unspoken hierarchies.

One such hierarchy is in the relating of a sympathetic tale, given the input necessary to generate a sympathetic relation. The spectator is activated in comparison to the originating individual's self-diminishment. The spectator finds agency in their imagination and familiarity,

[236] Lubey, *Excitable Imaginations*, 215.
[237] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 30.
[238] Smith, 28.

in comparison to the storyteller who ideally tailors their story to their audience. And in telling their story, the sharing individual lessens their emotional burden, at the same time that they re-live their experience. The spectator affectively recoups the speaker's affective detritus and shapes it within the frame of their own experiences. The originating party, although sharing their experience and retaining agency in that process, is oriented towards the spectator. I draw attention to this dynamic because of how the sympathy contract is exploited in white feminism, which depends heavily on the role of victimhood even when such a role is seemingly unavailable. Saidiya Hartman sees this dynamic in nineteenth-century enslavements narratives, wherein "the reenactment of subjection occurs by way of coerced agency, simulated contentment, and the obliteration of the other through the slipping on of blackness or an empathic identification in which one substitutes the self for the other."[239] Sympathy becomes a means for claiming another's narrative, agency, and identity. But involvement in a sympathetic dynamic is necessary to gain proximity to a socially legible identity. Yao writes,

> [O]ne must be recognized *as* sympathetic to be deserving of sympathy from those with the agency to sympathize. Thus, the marginalized do not have the luxury of being unsympathetic without forfeiting the provisional acceptance of their capacity for affective expressions and, therefore, the conditional acceptance of their humanity.[240]

Consequently, those who cannot evoke the sympathy of other citizens are themselves excluded from citizenship and personhood. These people are "disaffected" and "unfeeling," in Yao's words. Failing to meet the sympathy contract, the unfeeling are excess, outside the bounds of the

[239] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 7.
[240] Yao, *Disaffected*, 4.

sympathy economy and its socioeconomic possibilities. Kyla Schuller terms this process sentimental biopower.

> Sentimentalism [...] is a broad regulatory technology in which neurological and emotional tendencies play important roles in reconciling the impressible body to its role in a biological population, rather than a narrower aesthetics and politics of the moral aptness of emotional identification.[241]

Schuller's Foucauldian analysis illuminates how the sympathy contract can enact violent hierarchies and construct empirical differences where they previously did not exist. Those not at risk of losing their citizenship in this process are those whose identities are already closely aligned with the familiar.

But this understanding of sympathy is not totalizing; Ramesh Mallipeddi reads how enslaved and colonized populations wield the rhetoric of sentimentalism and sympathy contract for anti-colonial purposes. With texts such as William Dickson's *Letters on Slavery* (1789) and Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), Mallipedi argues that sentimentalism gives voice to the subaltern individual whose voice is lost in the dehumanizing processes of chattel slavery that turns people into sums for profit. In this light, Mallipeddi argues for "theorizing embodied slavery."[242] My argument does not contradict Mallipeddi's, but agrees somewhat with the notion that subaltern communities can successfully co-opt popular forms affectively and formally. Amatory fiction originates in part through such co-option, though with markedly different aims and stakes. Further, this subaltern co-option is baked into the romance form through amatory fiction, along the terms of Berlant's "survival

[241] Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling*, 9.
[242] Ramesh Mallipeddi, *Spectacular Suffering: Witnessing Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 5.

subculture." Survival subculture speaks to the aesthetic expressions resulting from specific shared experiences of enduring and surviving oppression. The romance form is, for women's culture, the main medium for disseminating survival subculture. The centralizing oppression is gender, specifically the white feminist's understanding of gender.

Virtuous sympathy

The sympathy contract within the romance form bestows intimate publics of women's culture the ability to, as Berlant describes, "*feel* like ethical places based on the sense of capacious emotional continuity they circulate."[243] The circulation process of this feeling is the circulation of amatory fiction, both the affective readerly experience and the commodity experience. Sympathy undergirds the romance form's depiction of love as reciprocity. Berlant uses reciprocity repeatedly to describe how women's culture formulates love. "Reciprocity is a morally laden, actuarial, and at the same time lovely, fantasy-based concept of what mutuality in love might actually be like."[244] Amatory fiction depicts love in this way through a material eroticism that equates ethical virtue, sympathetic feeling, and romantic love. Amatory fiction's material eroticism externalized emotions, turning them into actors that drove the narrative, and lingered on affective and physical descriptions that lent the tales a corporeal quality. This corporeality aggrandized the heavy handiness of amatory fiction, which also stemmed from the genre's proximity to the chivalric romance and the relative nascent of imperial consumerism.

Despite its authorial variances and ironic potential, amatory fiction continually casts the deserving lovers in its romantic dyads according to ethical feeling. Amatory fiction eroticizes sympathy, embedding it into romantic and platonic intimacy. As amatory fiction's main

[243] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 6.
[244] Berlant, 15–16.

differentiation is its emphasis on mutual desire, it constructs romantic love in the same terms of reciprocity as sympathy. And, in order for characters to achieve that relation of sympathy, they must first have the capacity individually. Minor characters and plots become means for showcasing the sympathetic sensibility of heroines and suitors. In *Love in Excess*, Haywood uses similar storylines to contrast the virtues of Melliora with the faults of Alovysa, D'Elmont's first wife. Faced with competition for the attention of D'Elmont, the two women react differently. Alovysa begins an affair and plots to trap her husband in a revealing state, only for her husband to accidentally kill her. Melliora, learning that the dying Violetta loves D'Elmont, is "not in the least possest with any of those little jealousies, which women of narrow souls harbour on such occasions."[245] Rather, Melliora holds Violetta's hand and urges her to live. Melliora's sensibility enables her to feel compassion rather than anger. Such a reaction signals to the reader Melliora's superior morality and confirms her romantic eligibility. As Ahern writes, "Characters having a truly noble nature are distinguished by a capacity to feel intensely, primarily as lovers but also as sympathetic souls attuned to the suffering of others."[246] Amatory fiction often turns to inset narratives to relay its stories; this narrative form shares the narratorial agency in such a manner that re-constructs the dynamic of sympathetic storyteller and spectator. Listening intently becomes the task of character, as well as reader. The plot of Eliza Haywood's *The British Recluse: or, The Secret History of Cleomira, Suppos'd Dead* (1724) takes off because one young woman assumes another has had similar mishaps in love, through which the two generate an intimacy that allows them to share their private tales because of this affective sympathy. Belinda narrates in detail her story of a scorned lover following Cleomira's own tale. Instead of describing how she feels upon receiving a love letter, Belinda tells Cleomira, "You may judge

[245] Haywood, *Love in Excess, or, The Fatal Enquiry*, 265.
[246] Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities*, 81.

with what Transports I read this Letter by those yourself has felt."[247] The women have the ability to sympathize with each other through their shared experiences and imaginations. The women share more than they initially intended. They discover their tales of woe revolve around the same lover. "We are indeed too nearly allied in our Misfortunes and to one fatal Source over both our woes!" despairs Cleomira.[248] In relating their stories to the other's sympathetic ear, the two affectively merge and, like romantic lovers, unite in a "solitary Life" in the country.[249] In *The Reform'd Coquet*, after hearing an abandoned pregnant woman share her story, Amoranda exclaims, "I have this poor Creature's Wrongs so much at heart, that I shall never rest till I recover her Quiet."[250] A seemingly random person's story suddenly consumes a central character. Yet rarely is there complete randomness in these early fictions—the man who abandoned this woman is courting Amoranda. As in so many fictions from Aubin to Haywood, amatory fictions typically unveil seemingly unconnected characters as intimately connected through past ties. The deployment of inset narratives illustrates the significance of platonic sympathy in amatory fiction. Like *The British Recluse*, Haywood's *The Tea-Table; Or, a Conversation Between Some Polite Persons of Both Sexes at a Lady's Visiting Day, Etc* (1725) takes the form of conversation, though between a group of men and women—and as such, the text politicizes conversation and advocates for both genders to partake in the project of sociability for personal and communal improvement. Jane Barker's *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies* (1723) and *The Lining of the Patchwork Screen for the Ladies* (1726), which partially function as sequels to Barker's *Love Intrigues* (1713), unfolds as an exchange of stories and poems between women. These narrative

[247] Eliza Haywood, "The British Recluse," in *Popular Fiction by Women, 1660-1730: An Anthology*, ed. Paula R. Backscheider and John J. Richetti (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1996), 209.
[248] Haywood, 222.
[249] Haywood, 224.
[250] Davys, "The Reform'd Coquet; or Memoirs of Amoranda," 44.

weavings mirror the fated quality of lovers and imply that sympathetic connections depend upon degrees of similarity rather than new bonds with the unfamiliar.

Characters who can attain such sympathetic feeling and withhold their erotic desire through reason are allowed entry into mutually romantic dyads. When *Love and Excess*'s Melliora and D'Elmont first meet, the narrator describes how, "the first sight of Melliora gave him a discomposure he had never felt before, he sympathized in all her sorrows."[251] When their eyes meet, "their admiration of each others perfections was mutual."[252] Describing this dyad, Ahern writes that Haywood's lovers are "sublimated into an erotics of sympathy, one that prefigures the sentimentalism that comes to dominate the fiction of later decades and at the same time belies the emphasis on chaste virtue that characterizes later sensibility narratives."[253] In Penelope Aubin's *The Adventures of Count de Vinevil* (1721), the narrator introduces Ardelisa and Longueville through their romantic intimacy. "There needed nothing more than this sympathy of souls to create the strongest and most lasting affection betwixt this young nobleman and lady; they loved so tenderly and agreed so well that they seemed only born for one another."[254] Though Aubin's work lacks the overt sensuality of Haywood, the amatory authors agree on the centrality of reciprocation. This reciprocation confirms the identities of the lovers as worthy of such passion and thus virtuous in some way. Longueville is "a young gentleman of extraordinary parts and beauty" with a "soul […] full of truth and ingenuity." Ardelisa is as "fair as Venus" and "her soul was capable of every thing that was noble." Because of their worthiness, they feel passion for each other; and because they feel passion for each other, their love is worthy. The romantic dyad is circular in logic, resulting in confusing exclusionary bounds

[251] Haywood, *Love in Excess, or, The Fatal Enquiry*, 86.
[252] Haywood, 86.
[253] Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities*, 69.
[254] Aubin, "The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil and His Family," 116.

complicated by the social decorum that women should not speak publicly of their romantic feelings. The romantic dyad is bounded by comparative examples that are excessive in their sexual desire. The ideal erotic is a muted yet sensual sympathy. This sympathetic erotic is properly social, espousing civic decorum and matrimony. The course of amatory narratives become locations for exploring how lovers successfully modulate their passion into a sympathetic eroticism that respects social expectations. Ahern writes,

> The ability of lovers to connect in Haywood's novel hinges on the notion of sympathy, or more precisely on the notion of compassion in the original sense of the word, that is, the capacity not simply to pity another person's sufferings from a distance, but to suffer together with another, to participate in suffering.[255]

While Ahern speaks explicitly of Haywood, the significance of sympathy extends beyond Haywood. Amatory sympathy leaves the page and joins with the reader.

Building on authorial intimacy with the reader, amatory fiction's virtual community is the shared resonance of readerly identification, whether the reader consumes sincerely or satirically. And readerly identification is a sympathy of sorts; a reader finds pleasurable affective alignment when enjoying a text. Like the harmonizing of two instruments, reader and text parallel their affective resonances. The harmonic parallelism denotes a sympathetic relation between reader and text. Yet, texts like amatory fiction refuse clear understandings and obfuscate their affective registers through satiric rhetoric. Consequently, a reader necessarily projects a subjective understanding of the text and construes that subjective reading as objective. Aleksondra Hultquist writes of Eliza Haywood's texts that "the reader's role is uniquely, simultaneously, that

[255] Ahern, *Affected Sensibilities*, 87.

of producer and consumer of texts."[256] The reader's own passions partake in the production of the text, fulfilling's the author's promise of emotional intensity with their personal experiences and expectations. In locating an affective register with which to harmonize, the reader asserts a specific understanding of the text. Whereas one reader may see *Love in Excess* as a sincere melodrama, another could read it with a guffaw that is equally pleasurable. In this subjective reader identification, readers constitute virtual intimacies with the text and author. The various intimacies, while genuinely felt, exist only within the imagination. Sympathy is the affective foundation of the romance form as intimate public. It is through sympathy that a reader establishes attachment to a narrative. How the reader arrives to and departs from a text is related to a reader's extant sympathetic alignments. Perhaps the reader sympathizes with Melliora, or Ciamara; perhaps the reader queers the narrative, or nurtures ironic sympathy. Lillian Lu has written on how *Pride and Prejudice*'s emphasis on marriage and family resonates with their experience as a person of the Asian diaspora;[257] with Leigh-Michil George, Lu has also written on asexuality in Austen's *Emma* (1815).[258] These examples illustrate the potential readings of the romance form and belonging to women's culture. The term "women's culture" fails to address all such subcultural investments in the romance form, though hegemonic ideologies seek to manage such unruly investments.

[256] Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, "Fictional Mechanics: Haywood, Reading, and the Passions," *The Eighteenth Century* 51, no. 1–2 (2010): 156, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecy.2010.0005.
[257] Lillian Lu, "The Bennets Are Asian American," in *2022 Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2022 Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Baltimore, Maryland, 2022).
[258] Leigh-Michil George and Lillian Lu, "'A Hundred Different Ways of Being in Love': *Emma* , Queer Austen, and Asexuality Studies," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 2024): 149–58, https://doi.org/10.3138/ecf.36.1.149.

Thoughtlessly sentimental

In the decades following amatory fiction's 1720s peak, the novel form—and along with it the romance form—turned inwards while Britain's power stretched outwards. Britain's culture expansion and economic shifts fed into a commodity culture, with the freshly lined pockets of a burgeoning mercantile class happily partaking. With social hierarchies evolving from traditional peerage and land ownership structures, citizenship becomes more malleable and the domestic space increasingly becomes a sphere for asserting socio-cultural significance. From this landscape emerges Eliza Haywood's *Miss Betsy Thoughtless*. The eponymous heroine moves to London after her father dies, leaving her an orphaned heiress in need of a husband. Alas, Betsy's coquettish nature muddles her journey towards love. Her most promising suitor, Mr. Trueworth, tires of Betsy's flirtatious deferral of marriage and marries Betsy's friend instead. Betsy marries Mr. Munden, feeling she has no choice in the matter given the degree of her flirtations and Mr. Trueworth's marriage. Her marriage to Munden is a disaster that ends in separation and then Munden's death, while Trueworth's marriage also ends with the death of his spouse. Betsy and Trueworth are thus free to marry and secure the happy ending of romance.

Haywood reworks amatory and burgeoning sentimental tropes to re-present a lovelorn heroine within a new schema of intimacy. Her mediation of amatory and sentimental is seen in the dangers that Betsy faces. Rape remains a constant threat, but Betsy also contends with her husband's emotional and financial abuse. This abuse reaches a fever pitch when he violently kills her pet squirrel that Trueworth gifted her. Such domestic violence is a departure from the intricate and borderline fantastical dangers in Haywood's earlier texts. The depiction of domestic violence heightens the emotional stakes of *Miss Betsy* because the reader gains greater

familiarity with Betsy's emotional duress.[259] The question of consent that amatory fiction frames within passive obedience is likewise complicated in this narrative magnification. Haywood pushes her romantic subversions even further. In the novel's most progressive event, Betsy leaves Munden. This agency is the result of Betsy's emotional growth, which leads to deeper interpersonal intimacy. Aleksondra Hultquist reads *Miss Betsy* as a liminal text that bridges amatory and sentimental genres through a comparative analysis of *Betsy*, Richardson's *Pamela*, and Haywood's 1720s fictions.[260] Hultquist sees Haywood paralleling her earlier work through side characters such as Miss Flora, the conniving stepdaughter of Betsy's guardian. "By setting Betsy against these foils, Haywood creates a character who exemplifies the interplay of the amatory and domestic forms; she not only possesses the passions and flaws of an amatory heroine, but also the temperate and thoughtful qualities of the domestic exemplar."[261] Haywood develops the domestic ideals of Betsy through adapting the rigorous virtue seen in Richardson's Pamela, which set the standard for sentimental eroticism with the serving-maid Pamela's continual resistance of her libertine master. Pamela lacks erotic desires, whereas Betsy is a shameless coquette. Even after she reforms her coquettish ways within her marriage to Munden, Betsy still has erotic desire, as her domestic reformation is largely due to her beloved Mr. Trueworth. And, as the pair do unite, the narrative confirms that Betsy's erotic desires did not fade with her first attempt at marriage. "As a heroine," Christoper Flint writes, "Betsy mediates the sexual extravagance of the romance (and its permutations in the scandal chronicle) and the

[259] This magnified glimpse into the dark side of heterosexual relationships is best exemplified in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, which likewise best exemplifies the sentimental genre. But as the focus is on generic transitions, I remain with Haywood for now and defer Richardson to my next chapter.
[260] Hultquist, it is worth noting, reads *Pamela* as a domestic novel; I read *Pamela* as sentimental in part because of the stakes I attribute to sentimental erotics. *Pamela*'s class politics leverage the story into a cultural conflict with ramifications beyond the immediate social setting; in addition, the epistolary form, I argue, establishes it as prior to the third-person narrative style that dominates the domestic.
[261] Aleksondra Hultquist, "Haywood's Re-Appropriation of the Amatory Heroine in Betsy Thoughtless," *Philological Quarterly* 85, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2006): 149.

repressive aims of domestic fiction."[262] Betsy's narrative rests within her mediation of amatory desire and sentimental conformity.

With narrative deviations like Betsy's failed marriage, Haywood transforms her amatory pen into a sentimental one. Plot-wise *Miss Betsy* reads quite similar to *The Reform'd Coquet*. But Haywood's novel builds out Davys's brief amatory fiction with psychological detail, an extended durational length, and a bevy of minor characters whose plots are co-constitutive with Betsy's. These alterations elevate the ethical concerns of Haywood's earlier works because the narrative remains an exploration of feminine virtue and feminine belonging within the romantic form. While the reader can still indulge in erotic escapism through Betsy, Haywood embeds the reader further within Betsy's moral dilemmas. Flint describes the novel as "[a]n amalgam of scandal chronicle, bildungsroman, roman à clef, and domestic fiction, which combines Behn's erotic ideology, Defoe's rapid plotting, Fielding's self-conscious narrator."[263] Flint's use of bildungsroman is particularly noteworthy given that the romance form, as I conceptualize it, is essentially a cultural bildungsroman for feminine citizens. Amatory fiction often functioned as direct commentary on socio-political actors, and in part from this function developed a meta-awareness of its fictionality. Amatory fiction's material eroticism brought together philosophical imagination and romance narratives in service of identity making. Sentimental eroticism expands on this erotic function, with seduction and romance narratives prompting extended moral reflection through which heroines shape themselves.

But this self-shaping, and the bildungsroman of romance, is a journey of conformity rather than independence. As such, *Miss Betsy* requires a standard of virtue for its heroine to

[262] Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998), 219.
[263] Flint, 247.

meet. This standard rests mainly in Mr. Trueworth, as well as friends like Lady Trusty, Miss Mabel, Miss Harriot. When Mr. Trueworth first meets Betsy at the home of her guardian, Mr. Goodman, he is smitten. The narrator reveals this and defers their romantic union at the same time. "Mr. Trueworth, who was yet far from being acquainted with the temper of the object he adored, now thought he had no reason to despair of being one day in possession of all he aimed to obtain."[264] Mr. Trueworth and the narrator introduce a moral expectation for women, which the narrator assures us Betsy does not meet. The narratorial statement is layered with temporalities that speak to the evolution of narrative time in the sentimental romance. Trueworth foresees a future with Betsy, which the narrator does not foreclosure; rather the narrator promises us that the pair's relationship will evolve over time. This is certainly the case, as Trueworth later reverses this opinion and his understanding of her character only to revert to his initial feelings. Trueworth does obtain Betsy, but in a manner that upends the typical amatory unfolding. Trueworth rescues Betsy from assault, which in an amatory fiction—such as Haywood's "Female Revenge" (1727) and Davys's *The Reform'd Coquet*—would ignite a mutual desire. The narrator remonstrates Betsy's inability to apply her otherwise "human, benevolent, and kind" character to her romantic life.[265] Betsy perpetually has the capacity to reform herself and refrain from, for example, attending the theater with a morally suspect friend simply to defy Mr. Trueworth. But the narrative depends on Betsy not learning her lesson: "In fine, the time was not yet come when she should be capable of being touched with that herself which she took so much pains to inspire in others."[266] While Trueworth and others serve as ethical models, Betsy has to

[264] Eliza Fowler Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, Mothers of the Novel (London ; New York: Pandora, 1986), 127.
[265] Haywood, 319.
[266] Haywood, 319.

close this gap between her potential virtue and her lived choices through her own internal reckonings.

The necessity of this process is evidenced in Betsy's aforementioned theater visit. Trueworth refuses Betsy's invitation to join them and recommends she ditch Miss Forward. At the theater, Betsy reflects on Trueworth's advice—a reflective moment that, as Flint writes, shows how "Betsy has already begun to internalize the voice of behavioral instruction, much as the domestic woman in the eighteenth century was intended to naturalize conduct-book rhetoric."[267] But, turning over Trueworth's words is little help, as Betsy's defiance and public intimacy with a mistress attracts the interest of a violent man who attempts to rape Betsy. This event further confirms Trueworth as the ethical paragon to which Betsy must orient her virtue to survive a dangerous world.

Adhering to sentimental eroticism, Haywood explores the terms of survival previously presented in her amatory works through Betsy's marriage to Munden. The marriage is presented as the sole means for Betsy to survive the physical and social threats of patriarchy. Betsy admits late in the novel, "'I rejected Mr. Trueworth only because I thought I did not love him enough; yet gave my hand to Mr. Munden, whom, at that time, I did not love at all.'" Betsy acquiesces to Munden's proposal after another rape attempt and the urging of her brothers and Lady Trusty—who all feel Betsy's flirtations with Munden have gone too far. Since the novel's start, Besty has flouted Lady Trusty's guidance. But now, Betsy tells Lady Trusty,

> "I am convinced by my own reason as well as by what your ladyship has been pleased to say, that I have indeed gone too far with Mr. Munden to be able to go

[267] Flint, *Family Fictions*, 222.

> back with honour, and since I find he has the approbation of all my friends, shall no longer attempt to trifle with his pretensions."[268]

Betsy is only interested in marriage as a means of survival, because it allows her to continue in the good graces of her social milieu and avoid further assault. Her brothers' insistence on marriage comes, though, from the same assertion of male dominance that threatened her physically time and again. Kristine Jennings writes,

> Betsy's avid consumerism and pleasure-seeking narcissism represent a reversal (perversion) of the accepted economics of sexual exchange and threaten the stability of a linguistic order as well, in which women are easily categorized as virgin, wife, mother, or whore, based on their use-value for men.[269]

Marriage is required of her in part because her coquettish life threatened patriarchal order. Within this order, marriage is the best method for constraining Betsy's erotic excess. Betsy's older friend, Lady Trusty, endorses this understanding of matrimony with a gloss that refashions matrimonial domesticity as a portal into embodying ideal feminine virtue. Lady Trusty "doubted not that the virtue and good-sense of that young lady would render her a very good wife, when once she was made one."[270] Though she also reflects on how marriage with Munden is "to less advantage than [Betsy's] beauty, and the many good qualities she was possessed of might entitle her to expect."[271] Marriage to Mr. Munden is Betsy's fault, because she did not reform herself in time for Mr. Trueworth's offer.

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[268] Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, 447.
[269] Kristine Jennings, "The Sign of a Woman: Femininity as Fiction in the History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 47, no. 2 (September 22, 2014): 41.
[270] Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, 446.
[271] Haywood, 446.

In a circuitous way, marriage with Munden does reform Betsy, but because the painful experience forces her through a remaking of self, which is a trademark of sentimental eroticism also seen in *The Female Quixote* and *Clarissa*. Betsy's survival ultimately depends on self-erasure and submission. At first bonding over their mutual love of entertainment and consumerism, the newlyweds are content. Quickly, Munden's sour temper emerges and he starts to control Betsy's finances in an aggressive manner. This is, per Lady Trusty, not worth remarking upon. She tells Betsy, "whenever there is any deficiency, as some there must necessarily be, in what might be expected from your way of living, I would not have you seem to take the least notice of it; —behave, as if entirely unconcerned, — contented, and easy[272]." Betsy does as much, slipping into the fiction of domestic bliss. Jennings writes, "the constraints imposed upon her physical desires and pleasures lead to the loss of her former identity and sense of importance, but this is what ultimately defines her as worthy woman."[273] Betsy starts to prove her worth as she navigates her marriage with Munden, and through this navigation learns that survival does not equate with safety. When Munden murders Betsy's pet squirrel, a gift from Trueworth, Lady Trusty still urges passivity. Because, while Betsy is clearly in emotional, financial, and physical danger, the performance of virtue matters more.

> Lady Trusty, who, for the sake of Mrs. Munden's reputation, was so eager to patch up a reconciliation at any rate between her and her husband, would not seem to defend [Betsy's] behaviour as a wife, while she gently accused him of having too far exerted the authority of a husband.[274]

[272] Haywood, 467.
[273] Jennings, "The Sign of a Woman," 40.
[274] Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, 490–91.

Betsy's error is that she called Munden a monster, stormed out, and began sleeping in a separate area. Betsy is "determined to be entirely passive in this affair."[275] In amatory fictions, survival typically included ethical safety, but the sentimental romance troubles this correspondence. Betsy could survive as Munden's wife, but this survival would predominately be a superficial survival: to others, Betsy is married, and that is sufficient. But, inside the domestic space—and inside Betsy's interiority—this survival is revealed as unsafe. This slippage reveals an instability in the ideology of virtue so as to reveal virtue as "a culturally imposed fantasy," as Jennings writes.[276] Sentimental eroticism, attuned as it is to psychology and suffering, recognizes a woman's domestic suffering. Betsy is, as Jennings writes, "forced into a fiction of femininity that disallows the pleasure she formerly could take in herself, what had been an integral part of her sexual experience."[277] Through her social identity as a wife, Betsy starts to adhere to the mandates of feminine virtue.

Her growing understanding of a woman's function in patriarchy also leads her to understand that there is a certain domestic violence her virtue cannot withstand: a husband who does not bother to hide his mistress. Munden begins an affair with Miss Roquelair, who is residing with the couple after she has seduced Betsy's brother, and bamboozled Betsy into generosity. Betsy's brother and Munden are simultaneously criminalized through Roquelair, thus affirming his brotherly insistence on Betsy's marriage as a mistake. At this point, Betsy absconds her domestic home, which so infuriates Munden he threatens her with legal action. The possibility of public exposure is all that keeps Munden from pursuing his full wrath. And,

[275] Haywood, 488.
[276] Jennings, "The Sign of a Woman," 42.
[277] Jennings, 40.

happily, Munden's anger and sins bring on an illness from which he dies before he can more seriously consider further weaponizing his marital rights over Betsy.

Despite this sinister exploration of matrimony, the novel endorses the institution because it is through marriage that Betsy finally reforms. Prior to her Munden's affair, Betsy's let her flirtatious self loose one last time when she plays coquette with a Lord. This Lord lures Betsy to his home, where Betsy rejects his advances.

> "Fie, my lord," cried she, with an air as haughty and reserved as it was in the power of any woman to assume, "this is not language with which the wife of him you are pleased to call your friend could expect to be entertained."[278]

The narrator notes how this response is a reversal for Betsy. At another time, how would the vanity of this lady have been elated to see a person of such high consideration in the world thus prostrate at her feet."[279] The threat of violence compounds with her matrimonial vows into heightened fear. Munden, who has yet to sleep with his brother-in-law's deceitful mistress, rescues Betsy. This rescue, as with Trueworth's earlier rescue of Betsy, does not reform her. Rather, the construct of marriage does.

> "Good God!" cried she, "what infatuation possess'd me! —Am I not married? - Is not all I am the property of Mr. Munden? – Is it not highly criminal in any one to offer to invade his right? —And can I be so wicked to take delight in the guilt, to which I am in a manner accessory?"[280]

Betsy accepts that she does not belong to herself. "In fine, she now saw herself, and the errors of her past conduct, in their true light."[281] Betsy remarks on how she has had "the character of a

[278] Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, 511.
[279] Haywood, 512.
[280] Haywood, 519.
[281] Haywood, 519.

coquet both silly and insignificant, yet did every thing in [her] power to acquire it" because of the male validation she received.[282] This validation was purely sexual and invited sexual violence. Betsy, too, realizes what the narrator has insisted on: "Nature has made me no fool, yet not one action of my life has given any proof of common reason."[283] In this moment, she acknowledges she regrets rejecting Trueworth and never loved Munden. Marriage with Trueworth was the correct match, but her virtues were insufficient for achieving this match. In an instant, Betsy is cured.

> This change in Mrs. Munden's humour, great and sudden as it was, did not however prove a transient one: — every day, every hour confirmed her in it; — and if at any time her natural vivacity made her seem a little pleased on hearing her wit, - her beauty,- or any other perfection, or accomplishment too lavishly extolled, she presently checked herself for it.[284]

Betsy is at fault for the numerous acts of violence men have committed against her. Reflecting on this last attempted assault, "she found that all her faults and *her misfortunes* had been owing either to an excess of vanity; - a mistaken pride, - or a false delicacy" (emphasis mine). Betsy is only rendered the agent of herself when she defies patriarchal orders. It is after this cure that Betsy discovers her husband's affair and leaves the marriage. This chronology is significant, for it further confirms that a woman who structures her virtue according to patriarchal logic gains survival and safety, which Betsy eventually achieve. Betsy recognizes psychically that she is a commodity on a sexual market, a market that runs so deep that "her body as well as her private interior is under the control of others and subject to their demands," Jennings writes.[285]

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[282] Haywood, 519.
[283] Haywood, 519.
[284] Haywood, 520.
[285] Jennings, "The Sign of a Woman," 41.

Acquiescing to others, however, may provide survival. But acquiescing to others' high ethical standard is, Betsy learns, paramount.

Betsy's delayed acquiescence occurs just in time for the death of Trueworth's wife; but their happy union is deferred so Betsy has the chance to flaunt her newfound virtue. Trueworth declares his unfaded love for Betsy. She aborts these declarations of love because Munden is still alive, and thus she remains a wife. "I am a wife, and being such, ought never to see you more," she tells the repentant Trueworth.[286] He "forgot that she was married" and "severely condemn[s] himself" so his behavior is excused.[287] Betsy and Trueworth remain loyal to their rigorous virtue, and only unite in matrimony after Munden finally dies. Haywood's subversion of domestic bliss and the direct correlation of survival and safety is nestled within the conservative dyad of Trueworth and Betsy.

Oriented through the heroine's interiority, sentimental eroticism throws its heroine to the wolves and demands that she physically armor herself with normative virtue to generate a psychic safety, from which she can discover social survival. There's a dash of vengeful amatory heroine here, as the sentimental heroine is required to overcome the persistent duplicity of patriarchal violence. But sentimental eroticism blends the virtuous virgin and vengeful victim tropes such that the vengeful affect is left behind. The self-blame remains, but the angry fury dissipates into prolonged suffering. From this place of suffering, Betsy's identity is furthered devalued, and arrives as a space from which she can rewrite herself. Besty's rescue into safety does not come through the heroism of a suitor but through her interiority, which sentimental eroticism understands is the heroine's access point for survival and safety. This internal

[286] Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, 572.
[287] Haywood, 580.

reckoning brings the heroine to "feeling ethical"—Berlant's term for the juxtapolitics of women's culture.

Juxtapolitical describes how women's culture structures political agency within its script for identity that alleviates individual responsibility, such that politics—and feminine agency more generally—is limited to feeling. Betsy, likewise, transforms according to a preset narrative. Rebecca Tierney-Hynes writes that "Betsy is a sociable, moral reader, in accordance with her mechanical passions, rather than the passionate writer who seems always to be the potential identity of Haywood's early readers."[288] Betsy reads and subsumes the social narrative of virtue displayed in her milieu—an affordance of the novel's larger world-building. In calling earlier heroines writers, Tierney-Hynes refers to the externality of plot in amatory fiction. In Haywood's amatory fictions, the bodies and passions of characters *were* the characters, manifesting their interior rationality in the physical world. Their tales were like stage plays, in which their emotions and bodies were the costumes that immediately signaled their stock narratives. Reflection occurred within the narrative action and outside of the mind. In contrast, Betsy must turn inward to accrue her own understandings of events.

Again, progressivism and conservatism arise simultaneously in this emphasis on interiority, such that radical potential emerges where and if one chooses to see it. With *Miss Betsy*, Haywood depicts consciousness as a dynamic space where the self can evolve. The romantic heroine reaches the pinnacle of social virtue—and gains the reward of marital love—through an empirical construction of self. By implying the potential for growth through interior cognition, Haywood lionizes women's interiority as a space of multitudes, thus reconfiguring the amatory binary of rational mind versus irrational body into configurations of self versus self that

[288] Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, "Fictional Mechanics: Haywood, Reading, and the Passions," *The Eighteenth Century* 51, no. 1–2 (2010): 167, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecy.2010.0005.

animates the mind. Tierney-Hynes writes, "The reader of romance represents the affective underpinnings of empiricist epistemology and eighteenth-century theories of the self."[289] The first reader of the romance narrative is the heroine herself, as she reads her passions and her story. This metaphor is especially true of sentimental heroines like Miss Betsy because the sentimental rhetoric is at heart a rhetoric of personal storytelling. The sentimental form fills Miss Betsy's story with more pages because the form has more to say about the self. This is an understandably appealing conceit. However, the heroine must contort her identity into a femininity that appeases not simply patriarchal figures but the patriarchal figures whose power coincides with their stringent ethics.

But what if there is *too* much to say? What if the sentimental form cannot account for the endless yammering of a woman?

Living the heroine's life

These questions are answered in Charlotte Lennox's 1752 *The Female Quixote*, which transplants Miguel de Cervante's *Don Quixote* (1612, English) into contemporary England and turns the eponymous character from a knight errant into the romance heroine Arabella. Lennox completed *The Female Quixote* with the support of Samuel Richardson and Samuel Johnson, whose shared belief in the didactic function of the novel heavily influences Arabella's arc from romantic dreamer to compliant woman. *Female Quixote* aggrandizes the playful impulses of Haywood's *Miss Betsy* and is a relentless satire of romance fictions and its woman readers. Raised in isolation by her widowed father (an unnamed Marquis), Arabella perceives her life through the seventeenth-century French romances that supplied her intellectual and social

[289] Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, *Novel Minds: Philosophers and Romance Readers, 1680-1740*, Palgrave Studies in the Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Cultures of Print (Basingstoke : New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7.

education. Because the Marquis' estate is partially entailed to male heirs, he contracts his nephew Glanville to marry Arabella to preserve his estates in full. Arabella resists the marriage even after her father's death. Her insistence on embodying the virtues of her fictional heroines precludes her from this marriage and other expected social norms of her milieu, much to the confusion and frustration of Glanville, his father Sir Charles, and his sister Miss Glanville. Lacking the daring adventures and unfading passions of her novels, Arabella invents these fictions and casts those around her as characters, despite their unwillingness to participate. Only in the last pages does Arabella accept her beloved tales as fictions and relinquish her commitment to imitating these so-called histories. Following her successful deprogramming, Arabella marries Glanville, who has sustained a sincere love for his cousin throughout her willful fantasies. The humor of Lennox's tale is found in the excessive imagination of Arabella. Arabella maps narratives onto her life, generating a container within which she can live playfully and safely. The predictability of her romances provides a stable guide for her liminal position as a newly orphaned heiress compelled to marry against her wishes.

In ridiculing romance fictions and readerly interpretation, *The Female Quixote* mediates older romances into the current romance form of the sentimental novel. The narrative achieves this mediation through refusing and reifying components of Arabella's romances. Arabella's attachment to her French romances isolates her socially. At times, she is the victim of cruel mockery; at other moments, she is the object of desire and praise that sets her apart from other women. While certain aesthetics of her romances are largely derided (the extravagance of action and language), underlying affective motivations parallel the cultural narrative that her social circle wishes her to join. Like her heroines, Arabella is trafficked through social expectations that mold the sentiments of wealthy women towards a class-associated ideal of passivity. Arabella's

conversion is not a complete overhaul of her mental state but rather an acceptance that the feminine excess of the romance form has shifted. Arabella may traverse romantic genres but she remains a heroine of the romance form—she traverses beyond form and into the romance mode, she explicitly shapes her identity around romance fictions.

Arabella's consumption of novels confirms that women's culture extends to the eighteenth-century–or, at least, that there was a cultural perception that the romance form trained women into the romance mode. Also consistent with women's culture is the ouroboros nature of its satire. The novel's humor arises from the obviousness of romance's false promises; but *The Female Quixote* succumbs to the promise of romance that it seeks to escape with its containment of Arabella's imagination. This looping temporarily generates subversion, and from it a rush of excitement for the reader in exploring the forbidden and non-normative.

Female Quixote establishes the romance form as a survival tactic for women through the brief history of Arabella's mother; romanticization is a woman's inheritance that offers a psychic safety within the confines of patriarchal oppression. Arabella's father, the Marquis finds social and economic success in the royal court, where he was "the first and most distinguished Favourite."[290] He becomes the victim of his own success and his rivals push him out of court. The Marquis convinces himself "he triumphed sufficiently over the Malice of his Enemies."[291] Channeling his fury into this rewriting of his fall, he embraces misanthropy and retires to a remote castle. He marries a younger woman "inferior to himself in Quality, but whose Beauty and good sense promised him an agreeable Companion."[292] To complete her heroine's romance inflected backstory, Lennox has the new Marchioness die days after giving birth to Arabella.

[290] Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or, the Adventures of Arabella*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Reissued as an Oxford World's Classics paperback, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 5.
[291] Lennox, 5.
[292] Lennox, 6.

From both her parents, Arabella inherits a penchant for reading, or worldbuilding. Her father promotes this interest by allowing her access to his library. His collection includes his late wife's translated seventeenth-century French romances. She "had purchased these Books to soften a Solitude which she found very disagreeable."[293] Following her death, the Marquis moves these books from her closet to his library. Margaret Ann Doody reads this movement as evidence that "for a brief while the romances had seemed to be canonical, worthy of a place in the gentleman's library.**"[294]** Alternatively, the Marquis memorializes his wife's romantic escapes until they consume his daughter too much. These texts are, as Doody notes, "Arabella's only inheritance from her mother."[295] While her mother's story attaches patriarchal entrapment to Arabella's literature, her father attaches his disillusionment and nostalgia to her education. Early in the novel, she declares, "Since the World is so degenerate in it's Customs from what it was formerly, [...] I am extremely happy in having lived in a Solitude which has not yet exposed me to the Mortification of being a Witness to Manners I cannot approve."[296] Hundreds of pages later, Arabella sings the same tune. "I am afraid, Sir, […] that the Difference is not in Favour of the present World."[297] Arabella's lack of interest in her world results from the nostalgic attachments of her seventeenth-century French romances. Madeleine de Scudéry is a favorite of Arabella's, and Arabella constantly cites Scudery's fictionalizations of historical and classical-era women. "But for the inimitable Pen of the famous Scudery, we had been ignorant of the Lives of many great and illustrious Persons,"[298] Arabella insists. Arabella reads these novels as histories and consequently "supposing Romances were real Pictures of Life, from them she drew all her

[293] Lennox, 7.
[294] Margaret Anne Doody, "Introduction," in *The Female Quixote, or, the Adventures of Arabella*, Reissued as an Oxford World's Classics paperback, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), xxi.
[295] Doody, xxi.
[296] Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or, the Adventures of Arabella*, 28.
[297] Lennox, 380.
[298] Lennox, 62.

Notions and Expectations."[299] While Arabella does not cite amatory fictions, there is a crossover between Arabella and this genre because seventeenth-century French fictions greatly inform amatory fiction. In this parallel transatlantic influence, Arabella mirrors amatory heroines. Because of her romantic allegiances, Arabella repeatedly refuses to marry her cousin, Glanville. While she articulates a desire to please her father, she reasons her refusal to marry Glanville through the logic of her novels. Arabella finds fault with her father's choice, because it is her father's choice. "The Impropriety of receiving a Lover of a Father's recommending appeared in its strongest Light. What Lady in Romance ever married the Man that was chose for her?"[300] She is also suspicious of Glanville's heroic qualities and interrogates her father, asking,

> [M]y Lord, by what Services has he deserved the Distinction with which you honour him? Has he ever delivered you from any considerable Danger? Has he saved your Life, and hazarded his own, for you, upon any Occasion whatever? Has he merited my Esteem, by his Sufferings, Fidelity, and Respect; or, by any great and generous Action, given me a Testimony of his Love, which should oblige me to reward him with my Affection? Ah! my Lord, I beseech you, think not so unworthily of your Daughter, as to bestow her upon one who has done so little to deserve her.[301]

Glanville's major personal failing is, however, that he has not suffered enough for his love and instead presumes their union will immediately occur. "What a horrid Violation this, of all the Laws of Gallantry and Respect, which decree a Lover to suffer whole Years in Silence before he

[299] Lennox, 7.
[300] Lennox, 27.
[301] Lennox, 41–42.

declares his Flame to the divine Object that causes it; and then with awful Tremblings, and submissive Prostrations at the Feet of the offended Fair!"[302]

Arabella values the heroic displays and rambling recountings of romances that centralize the all-consuming passion between equally virtuous characters. In short, Arabella is obsessed with a model of virtue that does not cohere with the marriage market of her world. She inscribes these archaic values into her life as a means of resisting her father, but with such exaggerated style that her resistance is rendered comical. "Since my Affection is not in my own Power to bestow, said Arabella, weeping, I know not how to remove your Displeasure; but, questionless, I know how to die, to avoid the Effects of what would be to me the most terrible Misfortune in the World."[303] Arabella invokes the fated nature of love in old French and amatory romances. From this fatedness, Arabella subsumes the notion that she is marked out for greatness.

Arabella's self-narrativization is both an expression of freedom and an acceptance of her entrapment. Her romantic delusions grant her a protective guise for retaining her agency through a mask of madness. "My first Wish," she tells her father, "is to live single."[304] She refuses to obey her father by "strengthening her own Resolutions by those Examples of heroic Disobedience."[305] Arabella models her agency on women whose disobedience pushes against their immediate social circumstances, while nonetheless valuing broader cultural virtues like passionate love generated through class-based virtues. Arabella fends off a myriad of imagined and real suitors, thus achieving her wish for a period of time because of her application of romance novels to her life. Her father's death and her romantic virtues become "weapons"

[302] Lennox, 32.
[303] Lennox, 54.
[304] Lennox, 41.
[305] Lennox, 27.

against marriage.[306] By facilitating a sustained singledom at a marriageable age, Arabella prolongs her position as a desirable young woman *and* indulges in her own erotic desires. She understands herself as a romance heroine in part because of her own superficial appearance, in addition to her class and wealth. "Her Glass, which she often consulted, always shewed her a Form so extremely lovely, that, not finding herself engaged in such Adventures as were common to the Heroines in the Romances she read, she often complained of the Insensibility of Mankind."[307] Starved of stimulation, Arabella projects onto her world the one entity that fills her with excitement: romance narratives.

As her narratives require a heroic suitor, she reads men according to their imagined relationship with herself as the romance heroine. Early in the novel, Arabella decides a new, young gardener is noble-born—like herself—and a virtuous suitor based on the romantic conflation of appearance with virtue and nobility. "He had a good Face; was tolerably genteel; and, having an Understanding something above his Condition, join'd to a great deal of secondhand Politeness, […] he appeared a very extraordinary Person among the Rustics who were his Fellow-Servants."[308] The narrative satirizes Arabella for doing just as an amatory heroine does. Arabella delves into her erotic imagination, conceiving of romantic scenarios like the gardener suppressing lovelorn sighs. These scenarios are founded on the absence of his interest. "She often wondered, indeed, that she did not find her Name carved on the Trees, with some mysterious Expressions of Love; that he was never discovered lying along the Side of one of the little Rivulets, increasing the Stream with his Tears."[309] Nonetheless, Arabella takes pleasure in mocking up this narrative. Her embodiment of romances engages her mind and

[306] Doody, "Introduction," xxi.
[307] Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or, the Adventures of Arabella*, 7.
[308] Lennox, 22.
[309] Lennox, 23.

allows her to indulge in her erotic desires. When the gardener runs into trouble for suspected theft, Arabella frets for his welfare—because, as a virtuous nobleman he obviously did not steal. Arabella, though, approaches the situation with delicacy. She "was at a great Loss in what manner to comfort her despairing Lover, without raising Expectations she had no Inclination to confirm."[310] Arabella, whether uninterested in pursuing her sexual desires or refraining based on social decorum, draws a line with her fantasies. And this line holds her within the liminal romantic space. Arabella already does what the narrative demands of her, in restraining her sexual proclivities through her romantic imagination.

Her self-narrativizing is done according to an outdated genre that does not accord with the patriarchal culture, and this dissonance is the source of the novel's satire; but, Arabella's exceptionalism allows her to survive this satirical mockery. Undeniably attractive, wealthy, and noble-born, Arabella's social position is secure. Arabella's background aggrandizes the self-importance that she derives from her heroine fantasies. These fantasies are deeply nostalgic, in both their temporal settings and their connection to her mother. Arabella brings this romantic nostalgia to her aesthetics. She dresses herself in romantic clothes, which inspires ridicule and fascination. Previously secluded in the country (and happy about it), Arabella travels to Bath and London with the Glanvilles, who hope exposure to modern culture will break Arabella's romantic notions. Unfamiliar with the custom of wearing a capuchin (a silk hooded cape) to Bath's Pump Room, Arabella instead wears "something like a Veil, of black Gauze, which covered almost all her Face, and Part of her Waist, and gave her a very singular Appearance."[311] Upon arriving, Arabella covers her face with her veil, a choice that indicates the willfulness of her aberrant dress given that other women in the Pump Room have their faces exposed. Arabella is "following

[310] Lennox, 26.
[311] Lennox, 262.

therein the Custom of the Ladies in *Clelia*, and *The Grand Cyrus*," two of Scudery's novels.[312] The women at first find her "Ridiculous" while "The Men were struck with her Figure, veiled as she was"—though the men fear she is hiding an unattractive face.[313] People at first assume she is a foreigner until they learn her wealth and status. Then, everyone falls for Arabella: The Men, hearing she was a great Heiress, found greater Beauties to admire in her Person: The Ladies, aw'd by the Sanction of Quality , dropt their Ridicule on her Dress, and began to quote Examples of Whims full as inexcusable."[314] This incident, like most in the novel, prepare the reader for the outlandishness of Arabella's next actions. Having seen the fashions of Bath, Arabella's next aesthetic spectacle is not the result of unfamiliarity. She "follow'd no Fashion but her own Taste, which was form'd on the Manners of the Heroines." Consequently, she orders a ball gown in homage to a fictionalization of Julia, Augustus's daughter who was infamous for her adulteries. Arabella's dress order becomes the butt of jokes until she appears in the outfit, which is reminiscent of Ciamara's sumptuousness:

> She wore no Hoop, and the Blue and Silver Stuff of her Robe, was only kept by its own Richness, from hanging close about her. It was quite open round her Breast, which was shaded with a rich Border of Lace; and clasping close to her Waist, by small Knots of Diamonds, descended in a sweeping Train on the Ground.[315]

She stuns the room into silence with this revealing garment, which is coupled with "Her noble Air, the native Dignity in her Looks, the inexpressible Grace which accompany'd all her Motions,

[312] Lennox, 263.
[313] Lennox, 263.
[314] Lennox, 263–64.
[315] Lennox, 271.

and the consummate Loveliness of her Form."[316] Arabella is repeatedly described as a consummate beauty. Descriptions of her chosen attire and her physical appearance naturalize her beauty within the terms of the romance form. Her aesthetics mediate historical fiction and real world beauty standards, confirming the continued aesthetic appeal of her romances.

These aesthetic spectacles exemplify the paradox of Arabella, and the paradox of the romance form generally. Arabella chooses these outfits on the basis of their difference. They, like her constructed persona, are intended to embed her in an alternative world within which she finds independence. A master of romance logic who performs their playful escapades, Arabella discovers intellectual, emotional, and physical freedoms in her romantic play that is otherwise forbidden to her. And while her romantic identification affords her greater liberty, this liberty is still within the container of her patriarchal culture. Her veil and ballgown individuate Arabella. This individuation is rooted within the rhetoric of passivity that re-inscribes the feminine subject into patriarchal hierarchy. Arabella reads as an outlier to social normativity with her romanticism. But, her romantic oddities—based as they are in patriarchal values—render her as exceptional rather than simply divergent. Her exceptionalism re-confirms her value status in the marriage market and makes her deserving of a heroic suitor. Arabella casts herself as the object of male desire in her fantasies, again and again, because she feels she deserves this position. She "thought the Reputation of her Charms sufficient to bring a Croud of Adorers to demand her of her Father."[317] Arabella constructs her resistant agency through the passivity expected of romance heroines. She desires erotic attention but at a distance that preserves her as a vaunted object. And she enforces this attention with her nostalgic aesthetic. Early in the novel, Arabella dons a "white Sarsenet Hood, somewhat in the Form of a Veil, with which she sometimes wholly

[316] Lennox, 272.
[317] Lennox, 7.

covered her fair Face, when she saw herself beheld with too much Attention."[318] Arabella's attire entices the local gentleman Mr. Hervey, whose presence inspires her to wield the veil defensively.

> Mr. Hervey's eager Glances threw her into so much Confusion, that, pulling it over her Face as much as she was able, she remained invisible to him [...]. This Action, by which she would have had him understand that she was displeased at his gazing on her with so little Respect, only increased his Curiosity to know who she was."[319]

Thomas Schmid, who reads Arabella against Freud's Dora, describes Arabella's romantic power in terms of lack. "Arabella's character is thus immediately predicated on her lack of influence," he writes.[320] She embodies this lack in covering her face, or temporally displacing herself in her Princess Julia outfit, only for the result to be that she gains attention. This is because lack, as Schmid deploys the term, speaks to the expectation of women as passive objects. She mirrors herself on the lack she reads in her romances. And she likewise mirrors this lack in her own erotic desires, imagining erotic interest where it does not exist. Schmid, writing on Arabella's gardener fantasy, explains, "As in male specularization, Arabella's 'sight' here constructs the other in terms of what it lacks, taking the very absence of signs of nobility as absolute confirmation of nobility and overwhelming desire."[321] In fantasizing sexual interest where it does not exist and constructing herself as an object of desire, Arabella's orienting virtue of romantic passion that promises to be her escape actually limits her imagination and agency.

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[318] Lennox, 9.
[319] Lennox, 9.
[320] Thomas H Schmid, "'My Authority': Hyper-Mimesis and the Discourse of Hysteria in 'The Female Quixote,'" 2023, 27.
[321] Schmid, 27.

Inciting humor and grief in those around her, Arabella fails to hold sway over others with her narrative fidelity; and the inner life she cultivates through these novels is revealed as nothing more than a failed mechanism of self-protection useful only for surviving her childhood. When first meeting Arabella, Glanville is "first disposed to laugh at the Strange manner" in which his cousin talks and rejects the idea of their marriage. Glanville then shifts to anger.[322] He assumes "the Scorn she had expressed for him was founded upon the Difference of their Rank and Fortune" because "he had no Notion of his Cousin's heroic Sentiments, and had never read Romances."[323] Glanville turns Arabella's character into a commentary on himself. For him, Arabella's romantic disposition signals class attachments–a symbolism that confirms my readings of amatory fiction and its legacies. Glanville, already in love with Arabella, attempts to charm her. He tries to perform to her liking to create an intimacy from which he can beguile her into normality—a plan similar to Formator's. He "resolved to accommodate himself, as much as possible, to her Taste, and endeavour to gain her Heart by a Behaviour most agreeable to her: He therefore assumed an Air of great Distance and Respect; never mentioned his Affection, nor the Intentions of her Father in his Favour."[324] Arabella brings Glanville to operate within her paradigm, but Glanville only does so to win her hand. Glanville's false embrace of romantic notions is exposed when Arabella tasks him with reading her fictions. He pretends to, and she exposes him with her deep knowledge of her books. She takes his deceit as "a Proof of his Disrespect," whereupon she cries in solitude while he laughs with the Marquis.[325]

Over the course of the novel, the family's dismissals of Arabella shift from playful to pathological, as the social stakes of Arabella's invented and real adventures become higher. Mr

[322] Schmid, 33.
[323] Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or, the Adventures of Arabella*, 33.
[324] Lennox, 46.
[325] Lennox, 51.

Glanville tells his father that "to be absolutely perfect [...] I must cure her of that Singularity" that is her fidelity to romances.[326] Arabella is initially couched within her familial world, which depicts her mental state differently from general society's. Through suggesting a cure, the Marquis implies Arabella's mental state is abnormal. Exposure to society increases the belief that Arabella needs treatment. An early suitor, Mr. Hervey, tells Glanville that Arabella **"**is the most fantastical Creature that ever lived, and, in my Opinion, fit for a Mad-house."[327] As the novel progresses, so too does the narrative questioning of Arabella's mental state. Glanville spends much of his time fending off those who view Arabella as an irrational creature. This extends to suitors like Mr. Hervey as well as to his sister and, increasingly, his father. Glanville repudiates these questionings with the intellectual and social virtues Arabella carries alongside her fantasies. Glanville tells Sir George, early in his acquaintance with Arabella, not to play into "Lady Bella's Pecularity" because "it gives me real Pain; and sure, you must acknowledge, you are doing me a very great Injury, when you endeavour to confirm a Lady, who is to be my Wife, in a Behaviour that excites your Mirth, and makes her a fit Object for your Ridicule, and Contempt."[328] Glanville finds fault in Arabella through the perception of others, and how that perception reflects on him. "I must cure her of that Singularity," he announces to Sir George.[329] Similar to Sir George, Charlotte Glanville engages with Arabella solely to subject her to public mockery (a lack of sympathy that indicates why Charlotte and Sir George are their own fated couple).[330] Charlotte, however, does so out of jealousy. She sees her cousin as "a Rival too powerful even to contend with" and weaponizes Arabella's romanticism as "a perpetual Fund for Diversion" in

[326] Lennox, 197.
[327] Lennox, 157.
[328] Lennox, 197.
[329] Lennox, 197.
[330] As Arabella precedes Marianne, Sir George and Charlotte precede Wickham and Lydia. Sir George attempts to seduce Arabella and fails, and instead seduces Charlotte. Their affair prompts their marital union.

social settings.[331] Privately, Charlotte undermines Arabella by likewise pathologizing her. She describes to her brother and father Arabella's "Intervals" of "a reasonable Way of thinking" and asks, "don't you think my Cousin is sometimes a little wrong in the Head?"[332] While Charlotte is firm on her stance against Arabella, Sir Glanville waffles. "[M]y Niece has very Strange Whimsies sometimes," he says in follow-up to his daughter.[333] Sir Glanville continues, "How it came into her Head to think Mr. Tinsel would attempt to carry her away, I can't imagine? For after all, he only prest rather too rudely into her Chamber, for which, as you see, I have forbidden his Visits."[334] This is a pivotal moment in pathologizing Arabella. She has (once again) imagined a suitor is attempting to kidnap her.

This time, she has imagined it because the suitor attempts to steal into her room. Tinsel, re-creating a familiar scene in many earlier romances, comes uninvited to the Glanville's home and Arabella's door. He pays off Arabella's maid Lucy to ask Arabella for an audience; Lucy relays this interaction to an outraged Arabella. Arabella lays out conditions for the visit, to which Tinsel does not agree; instead, he barges into her room.

> Lucy, who saw him making towards the Door, prest between it and him; and having all her Lady's Whims in her Head, suppos'd he was going to carry her away—Possess'd with this Thought, she scream'd out, Help! Help! for Heaven's Sake! My Lady will be carry'd away! Arabella hearing this Exclamation of her Woman's, eccho'd her Screams.[335]

[331] Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or, the Adventures of Arabella*, 322.
[332] Lennox, 308.
[333] Lennox, 308–9.
[334] Lennox, 309.
[335] Lennox, 300.

Arabella does not instigate this scene. The scene is a result of Tinsel's aggressiveness and Lucy's confusion. The women respond to Tinsel's refusal to respect Arabella's conditions for speaking with him. Arabella extends the event into a seduction narrative. She wakes from a swoon and assumes she *was* kidnapped and only recently returned to her room. This all leads Tinsel to declare to Glanville, "Upon my Soul, Sir, [...] if she is not mad, she is certainly a little out of her Senses."[336] Arabella has attempted to prevent an unwanted man from entering her private room, and for this she is deemed mad. Sir Glanville accepts this misogynistic interpretation that erases the violation of Arabella's privacy. The message is that men and not women define safety.

When it suits the men's interests, Arabella is worth hearing and her rhetorical style is praiseworthy. Arabella impresses her family with her discourse on indifference as a moral failing. "Sir Charles in his Way, express'd much Admiration of her Wit, telling her, if she had been a Man, she would have made a great Figure in Parliament, and that her Speeches might have come perhaps to be printed in time."[337] Arabella's speech resonates with the intensity she derives from romances, including in the recent incident with Mr. Tinsel. When aligned with Sir Glanville's beliefs, Arabella's intensity is sanctionable. When pursuing her imagination, Arabella's intellect is excessive. Demonstrable agency, from a woman, must operate in accordance with patriarchy to be permissible. Performed according to patriarchal standards, feminine agency is subserviently passive, which renders acceptable the unavoidable embodiment that defines women.

The ultimate affront that Arabella commits Arabella transgresses class, gender, and sexual decorum in public. In London's Vauxhall gardens, Arabella (drawing "a Number of Gazers" due to her veil) and her cousins see a crowd gathered around a man who playfully drew a sword on a woman, who is an escort. The woman, drunk and wearing men's clothes, screams and cowers.

[336] Lennox, 302.
[337] Lennox, 311.

Arabella assumes “this must certainly be a very notable Adventure. The Lady has doubtless some extraordinary Circumstances in her Story.”[338] She approaches the woman, telling her, “yet your Aspect persuading me your Quality is not mean, and the Condition and Disguise in which I behold you, shewing that you are Unfortunate.”[339] Arabella’s language draws the attention of onlookers, as does the fact that she is a well-dressed woman condescending to a sex worker. Charlotte “whisper'd with great Emotion, Lord, Cousin, how you expose yourself!” and Glanville attempts to remove Arabella physically.[340] The shame of Arabella’s social transgressions unmoors Glanville’s mental state. He is “almost mad with Vexation” and unleashes his most venomous language against Arabella.[341] “Are you mad, Madam, said he in a Whisper, to make all this Rout about a Prostitute? Do you see how every body stares at you?”[342] It is only when the public eye is upon them that Glanville’s love for Arabella becomes shame. Arabella refuses, or is unable, to drop her concern for the woman. “Are you base enough to leave this admirable Creature in the Power of that Man, who is questionless her Ravisher,” she questions her cousin.[343] The woman has become the subject of dispute between the man with whom she arrived and the man who held his sword against her. Arabella presses Glanville to “relate her Adventures” because she continues to transpose her romances onto the woman and thus see her as a suffering yet virtuous woman.[344] Glanville dismisses Arabella, telling her, “what I know of her is sufficient to let me understand she was not worth the Consideration you seem'd to have for her.”[345] Arabella, as Doody notes, approaches women throughout the novel with equal concern.

[338] Lennox, 335.
[339] Lennox, 336.
[340] Lennox, 336.
[341] Lennox, 336.
[342] Lennox, 336.
[343] Lennox, 336.
[344] Lennox, 338.
[345] Lennox, 338.

"It is one of Arabella's points of finer moral understanding that women are to complement each other, not compete."[346] While it is admirable that Arabella sees value in the women she encounters, she perceives them immediately as women worthy of sympathy–the sympathy that reads the speaker from the listener's point of view. Arabella assumes they are always suffering women in need of pity. She frames their story with her sympathy before they utter a word. Funneled through her romances, Arabella's expression of sympathy is a negative commentary of romantic sympathy, as well as the tipping point for Glanville and his father.

Both men settle in their belief that Arabella is a desirable woman yet unfit for marriage, a condemnation that decidedly medicalizes Arabella within the realms of hysteria. Glanville "firmly resolv'd never to attend her to any more Public Places while she continued in the same ridiculous Folly."[347] His father takes a harder stance that persuades Glanville further into isolating Arabella. Hearing of the encounter through his daughter, Sir Glanville "concluded she was absolutely mad, and held a short Debate with himself, Whether he ought not to bring a Commission of Lunacy against her, rather than marry her to his Son, whom he was persuaded could never be happy with a Wife so unaccountably absurd."[348] His son enters "Agonies" at this thought of sentencing Arabella.[349] But it is not until his father reminds him of "the Ridicule to which she expos'd herself wherever she went" that George submits.[350] Inversely to Arabella, George absorbs social decorum as his viewpoint. But like Arabella seeing through her romantic sympathy, George likewise sympathizes through his own feelings. George sympathizes with Arabella through his erotic love or his embarrassment. The latter wins out. The impetus for

[346] Lennox, xxviii.
[347] Lennox, 339.
[348] Lennox, 339.
[349] Lennox, 339.
[350] Lennox, 339.

treatment is the public shame that Arabella instigates through her attachment to out-of-date romances. She refuses various aspects of her feminine reality. Her desire to remain single, an overly energetic persona, a willingness to correct others in conversation, a grandiose concept of love, and an inflated valuation of lower-class individuals are all marks of Arabella's dissonance. Arabella is a woman in excess, and this excess is erotic because it is born from her romantic imaginings. An erotically excessive women, Arabella models the hysterical women. "This idea that her "romantic Notions" are a sickness [...] is equivalent to other attempts to 'medicalize' female sexuality that were current in mid-century," George Haggerty writes.[351] Louis Marin, in his study on the narrativization of medicine, writes, "The role of the imagination, paralleling doctors' claims at the time, makes this novel a milestone in the representation of hysteric pathology."[352] Arabella's mental state–namely her imagination's tendency towards eroticism–require curing. This hysteric diagnosis holds onto Arabella's desirability and writes her faults as an excisable aspect of her character. Her main fault is, of course, her outsized imagination that enables her erotic agency. "Arabella's exaggerated romantic discourse and code of behavior suggest female 'hysteria,' an Irigarayan hyper-mimesis of a male economy of desire in which woman serves as the sign of difference and lack," Schmid writes.[353] Hysteria is a patriarchal pathologization of femininity that locates cure in submission. Arabella's fantasies exaggerate this claim on femininity to become a threatening commentary. Arabella must be fixed because her excesses reveal the heteropatriarchal structures of her socio-cultural landscape. Glanville realizes her cannot control her publicly, which he attempted to do when Arabella aided the sex worker who did not need assistance. In failing to remove her physically and placating her with the

[351] George E. Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later 18th Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 130–31.
[352] Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or, the Adventures of Arabella*, 165.
[353] Schmid, "'My Authority': Hyper-Mimesis and the Discourse of Hysteria in 'The Female Quixote,'" 21.

promise of sharing the woman's back story, Glanville reveals the gap between the control he should have and the control he is unable to achieve. Likewise, Arabella marks herself as uncontrollable and thus beyond the bounds of feminine propriety.

Having established his *why* for Arabella's medical treatment, the trouble becomes *how* to effect a cure. Further placing Arabella in the misogynistic lineage of hysteria, Arabella's cure comes in the form of conversation. After Glanville decides Arabella requires a re-education, the novel races to its ending with Arabella falling under the deceit of Sir Charles and Glanville becoming a part of this romantic folly. The hope of Arabella's cure is realized through the illness that ensues from Sir George's failed plot. Like Arabella, Sir George once again goes too far and concocts a cruel plan for obtaining Arabella's interest; the violence that ensues initiates Arabella's reformation. And this reformation confirms the romantic telos of the novel that it also satirizes through Arabella. Arabella is increasingly content with Glanville as her future husband until she comes across a weeping woman. Enacting a chance meeting and inset narrative common to her romances, Arabella learns that this woman was abandoned by her heroic lover, Ariamenes. This woman, Cynecia, speaks Arabella's romance language. She details how Ariamenes interrupted a plot to kidnap her. Following convention, the pair fall in love, until Ariamenes' disappears and Cynceia suspects his loyalty. She tells the attentive Arabella, "[H]aving vow'd himself to my Service, and declar'd an unalterable Passion for me, I permitted him to love me, and gave him that Share in my Heart, which I fear not all his Infidelities will ever deprive him of."[354] Ariamenes is revealed to be Glanville, which horrfies Arabella. From here, the novel spins into a frenzied old-fashioned romance because of this plot–which the reader knows is implausible. Glanville quickly assumes Sir George designed this plot to sink Arabella's

[354] Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or, the Adventures of Arabella*, 346.

esteem of Glanville. Glanville embodies the romance suitor role, and pretends leave his home in the hopes of luring Sir George to Arabella and revealing the villain. Glanville sees a figure leaving Sir George who is dressed in an old-fashioned veil like Arabella's. Glanville stabs George, becoming the heroic suitor–until he learns the veiled woman was his sister, Miss Glanville. In the meantime, Arabella is likewise embodying romances as she roams around trying to find Cynecia with the aid of two unwitting women. Arabella talks herself into once again being the victim of a kidnapping attempt, after she starts describing fictional kidnappings. Fiction meets reality. "And the Detail had such an Effect upon Arabella's Imagination, bewilder'd as it was in the Follies of Romances, that 'spying three or four Horsemen riding along the Road towards them, she immediately concluded they would be all seiz'd and carry'd off."[355] Again, Arabella turns fiction into reality. She jumps into a river to save herself. But her ensuing illness brings her to towards the unfamiliar danger of death.

With this near-death experience incited through Sir George's plot, Arabella's "cure" finally begins. Fearing for her life (and sharing this fear with her family for once), Arabella requests "some Worthy Divine in her Preparation for Death."[356] Her uncle procures the unnamed doctor; Schmid writes of this doctor and Arabella that "Arabella's lack of authority is nowhere more pronounced than in her conversion to 'reason' by the Johnsonian clergyman in the penultimate chapter."[357] Arabella's relationship with the doctor begins after her "violent Distemper had made such a Ravage in her delicate Constitution, and reduc'd her so low that there seem'd very little Probability of her Recovery."[358] Her physical condition is so poor as to diminish her emotional and mental acuities. Because of her weakened state, Arabella is aware of

[355] Lennox, 362.
[356] Lennox, 366.
[357] Schmid, "'My Authority': Hyper-Mimesis and the Discourse of Hysteria in 'The Female Quixote,'" 33.
[358] Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or, the Adventures of Arabella*, 366.

her dramatics. “In the Divine Frame *Arabella* was then in, this Action appear’d to her rash and vainglorious, and she acknowledg’d it to be so to her pious Monitor.”[359] Once healed, Arabella’s stubbornness sets in again and she defends throwing herself in to the river because it was “conformable to the Rules of Heroick Virtue.”[360] In a Socratic manner, the doctor precedes to question Arabella on the veracity of her novels in terms of their historical accuracy and irrelevance to contemporary culture. “The only Excellence of Falsehood, answered he, is its Resemblance to Truth,” he says.[361] This is one of many explanations that reveal Samuel Johnson’s influence on the doctor.**citations** The doctor demarcates logically, rather than emotionally, the bounds of propriety for Arabella; this dynamic describes Arabella’s intellect as overly emotional and too involved with romances to see the emotional reactions of those around her. The doctor gaslights Arabella when he falsely paints her patriarchal culture as impossibly safe. Arabella is speaking with the doctor after a man has attempted to kidnap her, again. The doctor claims that the world today is mundane in comparison to her novels. “[T]he Order of the World is so established, that all human Affairs proceed in a regular Method, and very little Opportunity is left for Sallies or Hazards, for Assault or Rescue.”[362] The doctor’s bluntness reads like a gun in a swordfight. Yet, his generalizations are similar to Arabella’s, which we are supposed to read mockingly. The doctor turns the harms of Arabella’s society into a deductive argument. The world is safe, so Arabella does not need her extreme methods of self-protection that her heroines enact. As Doody writes, “[I]t is nonsense to tell a young woman that rape and abduction are only fictions.”[363] Yet with her life held against the adventures and assaults of

[359] Lennox, 366.
[360] Lennox, 368.
[361] Lennox, 378.
[362] Lennox, 379.
[363] Doody, “Introduction,” xxx.

romance heroines, Arabella begins to see the outsizedness of her perspective. Fiction has informed her perspective, rather than her perspective mediating fiction. The doctor tells her, "the Likeness of a Picture can only be determined by a Knowledge of the Original."[364] Her worldview, the doctor convinces her, has been too small to see its irrationality. "You have yet had little Opportunity of knowing the Ways of Mankind, which cannot be learned but from Experience."[365] The doctor first diminishes Arabella's source of knowledge then diminishes the self-importance that has emboldened her to action. Finally, the doctor interrogates Arabella's virtues. He argues that "these Books soften the Heart to Love, and harden it to Murder."[366] When the excesses of her romances are held against their violence, Arabella sees their absurdities. "Every Page […] is filled with such extravagance of Praise, and expressions of Obedience as one human Being ought not to hear from another; or with Accounts of Battles, in which thousands are slaughtered for no other Purpose than to gain a Smile from the haughty Beauty."381 Beginning to sound like Arabella monologuing, the doctor arrives at his cure. "I tremble indeed to think how nearly I have approached the Brink of Murder, when I thought myself only consulting my own Glory."[367] But as with each of the doctor's arguments, there is a caveat which favors Arabella's attachment. The violence to which the doctor refers is particular to certain romances, namely the French romances that Arabella favors. Modern romances largely eschew the heroic scale of these seventeenth-century romances. Lennox loses her satirical edge in the moment–and throughout the conversion scene. While Lennox's satire condemns a bygone genre of romance, a romance narrative mediates this criticism. The result is a sentimental romance, given the voluble emotions and preoccupation with social decency.

[364] Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or, the Adventures of Arabella*, 379.
[365] Lennox, 379.
[366] Lennox, 381.
[367] Lennox, 381.

The novel's bathetic collapse into the romance form is seen in how Arabella's treatment from a doctor of religion secures her heroine status in a modern English romance, rather than a seventeenth-century French one. Fresh from the doctor's dialogues, Arabella visits Sir George, who informs him of her deceit. This confession stuns the voluble Arabella into contemplative silence.

> Arabella struck with inconceivable Confusion, having only bowed her Head to his Apology desired to be left alone, and continued for near two Hours afterwards wholly absorb'd in the most disagreeable Reflections on the Absurdity of her past Behaviour, and the Contempt and Ridicule to which she now saw plainly she had exposed herself.[368]

Again, the public nature of her actions is the source of their criminality. Like Betsy, Arabella requires a model for virtuous decorum but her change comes from an internal reckoning. This reckoning also arrives after realizing the precarity of her survival and her safety—in the form of the most elaborate sexual assault attempt and Glanville's serious reconsideration of her wellbeing. Newly familiar with her reality, Arabella now knows to hide herself: "The Violence of these first Emotions having at length subsided, she sent for Sir Charles, and Mr. Glanville."[369] Apologizing to both, she submits to her role as niece and wife. She tells Glanville, "[S]ince I am so happy as to be desired for a Partner for Life by a Man of your Sense and Honour, I will endeavour to make myself as worthy as I am able of such a favourable Distinction."[370] Arabella positions herself as an erotic object–which she has done previously, but not in a matrimonial capacity. Arabella submits her agency to Glanville rather than to her own imaginative erotic

[368] Lennox, 383.
[369] Lennox, 383.
[370] Lennox, 383.

pleasure. Arabella holds her hand out for Glanville to kiss with "an emphatic Silence."[371] This lack of sound again evinces Arabella's sudden personality shift, as Arabella is incessantly speaking throughout the novel—an admirable trait if she were a man. In the final two paragraphs, Lennox marries Glanville and Arabella. She describes how "Glanville and Arabella were united [...] in every Virtue and laudable Affection of the Mind."[372] This statement could not have been made before Arabella's conversion, as she scripted her virtues in a different genre from Glanville. In developing the lovers' like-mindedness, Lennox positions her novel alongside other mid-to-late century novels where a sympathetic connection became increasingly valued. This sympathetic connection, also like in other novels, maintains its unilateral perspective. Mr. Glanville dictates the terms of their union.

The satirical aspect of *Quixote*, like the much later *Bridget Jones's Diary*, becomes a self-defeating commentary on the romance form because of how the satirical dimension collapses into the sincere. With this collapse, the novel not only confirms itself as a modern romance but also subtly approves of Arabella's subsumption into the romance mode. Her and Glanville's romantic arc requires her delusions and the delusions become a real part of their story. It is only through Sir George's complex deception that Arabella recognizes she loves Glanville.

> Our charming Heroine, ignorant till now of the true State of her Heart, was surpriz'd to find it assaulted at once by all the Passions which attend disappointed Love. Grief, Rage, Jealousy, and Despair made so cruel a War in her gentle Bosom, that unable either to express or to conceal the strong Emotions with which she was agitated, she gave Way to a violent Burst of Tears.[373]

[371] Lennox, 383.
[372] Lennox, 383.
[373] Lennox, 349.

This passage, reminiscent of amatory fiction, mocks Arabella's romances. Yet, this moment of realization is critical in delivering Arabella towards reformation. And, it is a critical moment of rewriting much older romances–this scene is firmly within Arabella's lived realm. It is without the violence for which that doctor denigrates romances. Though dramatic, this moment does not match Arabella's usual melodramatics. While Arabella must temper her romantic inclinations, Mr. Glanville must embolden his: his denouement with Sir George and his sister likewise positions Glanville in a romance. Despite *Quixote's* satire, the characters never leave the realm of romance. Rather, the satire becomes a part of the playfulness that romance requires.

In this satirical play, erotic sympathy is dismantled and reconfigured. Arabella's imagination is her initial source for sympathy, in accordance with Smith's configuration. Through her imagination, Arabella relates to and emotes with others. She develops her identity around the sympathy she constructs with her heroines—like the imagined sympathy of an intimate public. And she does the same with the women she encounters, projecting her inner world onto them and assuming they, too, are citizens of the same romantic community. She is brought to renounce her sense of sympathy, however, to the sympathy of her social world, articulated through the doctor's rationality. Logic displaces imagination because of the security it seemingly provides. But, as we've seen, the logic of the doctor is likewise a fiction. This logic enforces sympathy only as a proper feeling when it is in keeping with the world as Arabella's social circle sees it—specifically, as her cousin and uncle see it. Sympathy is still based in imagination, just not a woman's imagination. Following the dictates of a masculine worldview, sympathy enforces gendered identities.

The Female Quixote shows how sympathy affectively polices the boundaries of feminine excess by demarcating belonging along ethical terms. Those around Arabella restrain her

imaginative approach to sympathy by framing it as unethical. Her sympathy, through which she communes with herself and other women, supports endless (and fictional) violence; whereas *proper* sympathy connects her to the ethics of her social sphere—ethics which refuse to recognize violence and oppression. Belonging to society requires restraining one's sympathy with victims of violence and framing alternative morals as excessive. Ethical alignment is achieved through a sympathy that accepts myopic ethics and the preservation of social hierarchies. Because this sympathy aligns with the hegemonic views, it is how citizens "feel ethical"—which is how Berlant describes the juxtapolitics of women's culture. How an individual approaches sympathy determines belonging within normativity. Sympathy operates as a social contract; in the romance form, the unseen terms of the sympathy contract come to the fore. The romance form offers an imitable model for fulfilling the sympathy contract.

The skeptical eroticism of Austen

By the end of the eighteenth century, the vogue for sentimental romances and their satirical offspring gives way to the skeptical epistemology of domestic fictions. Frances Burney was the most successful author of this new romantic genre in the late eighteenth-century. In the long run, however, Austen's turn-of-the-century publications have sustained mass appeal. Because of Austen's canonical status in the ensuing centuries, I linger on Austen. In describing Austen's erotics, I argue that her works politicize women's feelings in a similar manner to amatory fiction. In this structuring of women's feelings, modern adaptations ultimately repurpose Austen within the hierarchies of white femininity. I introduce this depiction of white femininity in both amatory fiction and Austen in this chapter but explore it in depth in my next chapter.

Affective continuities between amatory fiction and Austen's corpus are largely due to Austen's dependence on the conventions of the seduction narrative and virtuous union, which predates amatory fiction. Tiffany Schubert explicates the ways in which Austen appropriates chivalric romances and thus provides an indirect link to amatory fiction. Schubert writes, "The medieval language in *Emma* is especially revelatory of the titular heroine's understanding of love, for the matches she makes, attempts to make, or simply imagines are romantic matches, shaped by the tradition of courtly love." [374] Emma's perspective is embedded in the rhetoric of chivalric romances, leading her to understand love as gratitude. "Ordinary kindness is a truer form of service than extraordinary gallantry. This is a lesson that Emma must learn."[375] Emma's relationship with Harriet in particular offsets Emma's heightened understandings. "Emma's view of service is more traditionally medieval, with her focus on dramatic rescue; Harriet's view of service is Austen's revision of the term," Schubert writes.[376] In Schubert's reading, Austen construes Emma as a heroine whose outdated notions of romance must become current in order for her to not only find love but also develop her interiority. Reversing the gendering of the service-oriented hero seeking ennoblement, Emma undergoes an education in modern virtue over the course of Austen's novel.

More broadly, Austen's recurring skepticism mapped onto lover dyads remodels amatory fictions' material epistemology founded on the complex nature of bodily sincerity. The body, amatory fiction explores, can display truth; yet the truth it displays may not always be virtuous. The opulent setting of Ciamara is certainly sensuous, displaying a very real sexual nature. Yet, it takes the trained eye of an amatory reader to understand her sexuality is lascivious and not

[374] Tiffany Schubert, "'She Heard All Mrs. Elton's Knight-Errantry on the Subject': Emma as Chivalric Romance," *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 39 (2017): 228.
[375] Schubert, 230.
[376] Schubert, 230.

amorous. Meliora and D'Elmont's sexual chemistry, however, bespeaks a metaphysical chemistry. This virtuous union is generated through a balance of reason and feeling. Austen's novels depict a similar attitude of mediating excessive passion through reason, albeit through interior rather than material aesthetics. Austen eschews the amatory and sentimental trope for detailed descriptions of emotions—expositions that occur through bodily descriptions, internal monologues, or narratorial explanations. Such lingering emotional details led to the exposure of characters' internal machinations. Austen is comparatively opaque, yet she paradoxically heightens her narrative sense of interiority. In obscuring her characters emotions through ironic, terse, or biased descriptions, Austen pushes emotions within her characters. Emotions and thought sit closer together, which seems to represent human reality more accurately. Without the body as signpost, characters must discern each others' interiority by wading through their own interiority. Similarly lacking the guidance of amatory and sentimental fictions, the reader is invited to do the same and approach Austen's worlds with skepticism.

This skepticism undergirds Austen's irony, which Austen connects with genre tropes to recalibrate the romance genre into contemporary socio-cultural signifiers, with the result of reconstituted romance fictions. Kathryn Sutherland writes, "Her novels are written as elaborate patterns of difference and opposition in which the discordant elements vitally contribute to each other's construction, with the result that meaning never finally settles but remains at play across a range of possibilities."[377] This range, however, is circumscribed within the ideological framework of the romance form. Austen's heroines are often admired for their personal ethics, disavowal of social elitism, and intellectual capacities. Such characteristics mark her heroines as

[377] Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 353–54.

exceptional in their world and grant them a respected role in the society that Austen consistently skewers. And, these characteristics are often the heroines' sins as well as their virtues. Their intellect or ethics becoming the source material for their liminal suspension in the romance form. Feminine excess remains the concern in the domestic novel. Satirical irony likewise remains a rhetorical device for framing the acceptable bounds of feminine excess. With her irony, Austen—like her predecessors in amatory and sentimental fiction—challenges the line that separates the ideal and the abject. The newest heroine of the romance form only ever straddles this line, subsuming bits and pieces of the overembodied woman into the disembodied ideal. This mediation, and Austen's ironic obfuscation, is born from amatory fiction. The earlier genre narrativized cultural commentary on feminine excess from a feminine perspective, with a satirical irony that subtly critiqued and challenged gender politics, in addition to other philosophical and political conversations. This satirical irony is fundamentally gendered, by virtue of the cultural denigration of not just romance but also the imagination. The imagination's contemporary association with femininity is in part due to the empirical impossibility of the imagination. The imagination is fluid and changeable, unlike masculine pursuits of reason and materialism. Austenian irony is an amatory irony, an irony of feminine excess, that we see historically extended in ironic attachments to women's culture. Sending What Should We Call Me memes or hatewatching *The Bachelor* are examples of ironic feminine excess, wherein an individual's rejection of a normative object does not fully distance the individual from the object's proximity. The legacy of white feminism that I trace through the amatory affective aesthetic is the outcome of attempted distancing, wherein potential affective subversions are occluded in favor of an object's normative reverberations.

To the vast corpus of Austen scholarship, I offer a reading in the vein of D.W. Harding's seminal and infamously contentious "Regulated Hatred."[378] My notion of Austen's regulated violence is not a direct response to Harding's essay but falls within the genealogy of Austen counter-readings that Harding champions in his essay. While all the illnesses that Austen depicts mirror the contemporary likelihood of severe illness, Austen deploys harm against her characters for narrative purposes. Her characters, too, evince an awareness of the narrative potential of illness; *Sense and Sensibility*'s Marianne exaggerates an ankle sprain to prolong the attentions of Mr. Willoughby while *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mrs. Bennett knowingly sends Jane out during a storm with the hope she'll catch sick. These small incidents display a specific gendered dynamic wherein the young woman becomes a victim of an illness that her dashing suitor can ameliorate.[379] Austen likewise enacts this dynamic through more circumstantial and unwilled illnesses. Similar to the inveigling Mrs. Bennett, Austen subjects her characters to violence to enforce romantic unions; in order to arrive at these plot lines, Austen curtails the narrative excess and preserves the telos of the romance genre. Two instances are Marianne's illness in *Sense and Sensibility* and Louisa Musgrave's fall in *Persuasion*.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen characterizes Marianne Dashwood as a romance heroine of decades past, in contrast to the modern decorum of her sister Elinor. This contrast is played out in their romantic relationships. Initially, Marianne operates within the emotional and rhetorical sphere of amatory fiction, but her illness endears her to Colonel Brandon and contains her feminine excess. Marianne undergoes a phenomenological shift that erodes her sensual

[378] Denys Clement Wyatt Harding, *Regulated Hatred and Other Essays on Jane Austen*, ed. Monica Lawlor (London ; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone Press, 1998).
[379] Though I focus on women characters, men are also subject to illness. Tom Bertram, for example, in *Mansfield Park* requires a grave illness to undergo his moral transformation. This incident reminds us that contemporary understandings of the body and feelings were much more closely linked than in our time. Nonetheless, even with Tom, illness circumscribes an excessive character into propriety of which the domestic (and thus feminine) world approves.

amatory affect and refashions her as a sensible heroine, in keeping with her sister's skepticism. Through their union, Austen illustrates that the excesses of women's desires can be socially permissible if mitigated through a skeptical epistemology. The result is a skeptical eroticism that prolongs the development of sympathetic intimacy, in contrast to a material eroticism instantaneously formed—and always regretted. Skeptical eroticism unfolds through repeated encounters between lovers in various scenarios, and it requires even more internal reflection than in sentimental romances.

As such, normative romance appears more reserved and interior, with Marianne's initial penchant for an outwardly emotional and amorous union deemed excessive. This distinction is made explicit through Elinor's and the narrator's perspective, which are both grounded in skepticism. "Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her sister's sensibility."[380] This excess of Marianne's is displayed through her relationships with others, especially with John Willoughby. Willoughby is the rake in Marianne's amatory fiction, though from Marianne's perspective his rakishness is translated into fashionable heroism. Willoughby is introduced to the text through his physicality. He rescues the fallen Marianne, creating a tableau that resonates with the material aesthetic of amatory literature, and thus catapults Marianne's affective register into the erotic. Willoughby's physical person corresponds with Marianne's fictive understanding of a proper suitor.

> His person and air were equally to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story; and in his carrying her into the house with so little previous formality, there was a rapidity of thought which particularly recommended the

[380] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Kathleen Viola James-Cavan, Broadview Literary Texts (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2001), 44.

> action to her. Every circumstance belonging to him was interesting. His name was good, his residence was in their favourite village, and she soon found out that of all manly dresses a shooting-jacket was the most becoming. Her imagination was busy, her reflections were pleasant, and the pain of a sprained ancle was disregarded.[381]

Not only does Austen explicitly relay how Marianne's understanding of a suitor comes from narrative worlds, but she also orders Marianne's inner logic like the introduction of a fictional suitor with all the bare facts of Willoughby's existence readily laid out. These facts, that are uninformative as to Willoughby's actual character, form the basis of Marianne's imagined understanding of Willoughby. As though reading a book, Marianne's imagination is so absorbed into the fictional realm that her physical body is left behind. In place of the real, Marianne enters a disembodied fictive state that proffers an imaginative embodiment within an amatory dyad. Despite Marianne having "seen less of his person than the rest" of the party, Marianne conceives a complete understanding of Willoughby.[382] In that imaginative embodiment, affective ties are stronger than empirical ones: the atmospheric projection of selves holds greater weight than the lived actions and experiences of selves.

Critically, the excessively amorous lovers unite at a faster rate than the skeptical. Willoughby moves Marianne with "so little previous formality," as if they already share an intimate bond. Marianne readily unspools an entire heroic narrative around Willoughby. Their rapid intimacy is reflected in Marianne's unreserved nature, for which Elinor teases her after Marianne's first meeting with Willoughby.

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[381] Austen, 79–80.
[382] Austen, 79.

> ‘You will soon have exhausted each favourite topic. Another meeting will suffice to explain his sentiments on picturesque beauty, and second marriages, and then you can have nothing farther to ask.’
>
> ‘Elinor,’ cried Marianne, ‘is this fair? is this just? are my ideas so scanty? But I see what you mean. I have been too much at my ease, too happy, too frank. I have erred against every common-place notion of decorum; I have been open and sincere where I ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful:—had I talked only of the weather and the roads, and had I spoken only once in ten minutes, this reproach would have been spared.’[383]

Marianne’s affective inclination for Willoughby exceeds the temporal mandates of her society. It is too much too soon.

In contrast, Elinor models a sensibility of skeptical empiricism that is mirrored in her suitor Edward; together they depict a modulated sensibility appropriate for their socio-cultural reality between mercantile and aristocratic spheres. Elinor is introduced as having “a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment” that do not prohibit her from feeling.[384] Indeed, “her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them.”[385] This skill of Elinor’s is exhibited in the sudden appearance of a remorseful Willoughby after he learns that, following his abandonment of Marianne in favor of an heiress, Marianne is near death. At first deeply affected by Willoughby’s drunken state, Elinor gives her feelings time to detach from her mind so she can approach the situation with logical attention. “Reflection had given calmness to her judgment, and sobered her own opinion of Willoughby’s deserts;—she wished, therefore, to declare only

[383] Austen, 83.
[384] Austen, 44.
[385] Austen, 44.

the simple truth, and lay open such facts as were really due to his character, without any embellishment of tenderness to lead the fancy astray."[386] The affective tenderness Elinor feels towards Willoughby illustrates the potency of the passions and the difficulty of restraining them in favor of propriety and sociable rationality. And yet, Austen shows that Elinor triumphs over the temptations of amatory affect. She, unlike Marianne, does not make social gaffes or publicize her desires. Elinor has absorbed a prudent skepticism of even her own self, which ensures her social survival.

Whereas Elinor originates as a well-tempered character requiring no educational journey, the novel works to mitigate Marianne's romantic sentimentality into Elinor's mode of sensibility.. In keeping with earlier amatory understandings of the passions and emotions, Marianne allows affective and emotional connections to control her rational and physical selves. Upon Willoughby's first absconding from intimacies of Barton Cottage, Marianne willingly falls prey to her feelings. "This violent oppression of spirits continued the whole evening. She was without any power, because she was without any desire of command over herself."[387] Marianne slips into a depressive state that rattles her physical body. Multiple times, the rakish behavior of Willoughby strains Marianne. "Marianne, now looking dreadfully white, and unable to stand, sunk into her chair, and Elinor, expecting every moment to see her faint, tried to screen her from the observation of others, while reviving her with lavender water."[388] And yet, Marianne holds on to her affective intensities to the point of finding joy in her unhappiness. Upon visiting the Palmers' residence at Cleveland—which is near Willoughby's home—Marianne luxuriates in her pain.

[386] Austen, 353.
[387] Austen, 114.
[388] Austen, 200.

> In such moments of precious, of invaluable misery, she rejoiced in tears of agony to be at Cleveland; and as she returned by a different circuit to the house, feeling all the happy privilege of country liberty, of wandering from place to place in free and luxurious solitude, she resolved to spend almost every hour of every day while she remained with the Palmers, in the indulgence of such solitary rambles.[389]

It is only when Marianne arrives at this state of lugubrious contentment that illness strikes. Defined through her enthusiasm, Marianne must become even more ill to the point that she loses her agential ability to feel pleasure.

Marianne's illness alters her affective relations, as evidenced most clearly in her changed relationship to Colonel Brandon. Throughout the novel, Marianne's distaste for Brandon is evident. "'It is Colonel Brandon!' said she, with vexation. 'We are never safe from him.'"[390] Brandon discloses his past love as a reason for his inclination for Marianne. "His chief reward for the painful exertion of disclosing past sorrows and present humiliations, was given in the pitying eye with which Marianne sometimes observed him, and the gentleness of her voice whenever (though it did not often happen) she was obliged, or could oblige herself to speak to him."[391] Austen's narratorial voice emphasizes Brandon's vulnerability, thus implying that Marianne should feel towards him. The sympathy contract is staged, and it is Marianne's womanly duty to feel towards Brandon such that she submits to being his lover. Marianne's behavior towards him remains begrudging. She continues to disregard Brandon until she becomes more ill. Her willful unhappiness is no longer comforting to her as her body

[389] Austen, 312–13.
[390] Austen, 223.
[391] Austen, 234–35.

deteriorates. “Poor Marianne, languid and low from the nature of her malady, and feeling herself universally ill, could no longer hope that tomorrow would find her recovered.”[392] In the face of her illness, Brandon displays his good character as he “acted with all the firmness of a collected mind, made every necessary arrangement” for procuring travel arrangements for Mrs. Dashwood.[393] Marianne’s illness forces her into a reflective state akin to Elinor’s constant empiricism. Restaging Miss Betsy’s and Arabella’s reformations, Marianne explains to her sister,

> Long before I was enough recovered to talk, I was perfectly able to reflect. I considered the past: I saw in my own behaviour, since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself, and want of kindness to others. I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave. My illness, I well knew, had been entirely brought on by myself by such negligence of my own health, as I had felt even at the time to be wrong. Had I died, it would have been self-destruction.[394]

Unable to access her passion due to her physical illness, Marianne rationally reflects on how she relates to her feelings, specifically through her relationship with Willoughby. The language of self-destruction echoes the behavior of earlier heroines, such as Fantomina. Marianne, however, avoids the path of these heroines due to “the very eagerness of [her] desire to live,” which includes a desire for “atonement to [her] God” and a desire to not inflict grief on her family.[395]

[392] Austen, 316.
[393] Austen, 320.
[394] Austen, 350.
[395] Austen, 350.

Marianne's sickness operates like a leeching: her affect bleeds out of her, taking her strong personality and beliefs with them. Her illness excises her overly excessive femininity and leaves a shell of Marianne. This shell now operates within the parameters of social decorum. This shift is evidenced not only in her eventual union with Brandon but also her restrained reaction to Willoughby's visit with Elinor. Listening to Elinor with a "panting eagerness" and tearful face, Marianne evinces her emotional turmoil in a non-linguistic manner.[396] "A thousand inquiries sprung up from her heart, but she dared not urge one."[397] She restrains her speech, as Elinor previously has regarding her own amours. With Marianne's emotions no longer disseminating outwardly and the narratorial perspective anchored in Elinor, Austen obfuscates Marianne's emotional rationale for Brandon and Marianne's ultimate union. The outcome of this narrative masking is that Marianne's marriage reads as a terminus to Marianne's agency, wherein her sensibility is safeguarded from excessive possibilities. Whereas the reader is provided ample insight into Elinor's affection for Edward and Marianne's for Willoughby, the novel ultimately disbars the reader from access to Marianne's feelings towards Brandon. Her early dismissal of Brandon is evident, as is her shift to kindness; but these are external displays that do not bespeak the degree of her emotion. All this is to say: does she even want to marry this guy? The novel answers this question by positioning Marianne as Brandon's consolation prize for his past sufferings. "[Mrs. Dashwood, Elinor, and Edward] each felt his sorrows, and their own obligations, and Marianne, by general consent, was to be the reward of all."[398] The novel envisions this as a better fate for Marianne. "Instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself with expecting, [...] she found herself at

[396] Austen, 352.
[397] Austen, 352.
[398] Austen, 380.

nineteen, submitting to new attachments."[399] Her relationship with Willoughby was violent compared to hers with Brandon. This is seen in the shift from "falling a sacrifice" to "submitting." And yet, there is also an inversion of power in this language. In "falling a sacrifice" to Willoughby, Marianne would become a martyr to love; contrast this to the humbleness of "submitting." The novel asserts that "Marianne found her own happiness in forming [Brandon's]" and that "her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby."[400] Again lacking, however, is direct insight into Marianne's interiority, which would reveal the degree and quality of her feelings. For a novel so concerned with interiority, there is an irony in Marianne's rapid denouement. But this is the task of the reader: to enter into Austen's characters requires the reader's own skeptical empiricism.

The excising of Marianne's amatory affect is narratively necessary within the purview of the skeptical introspective empiricism that Austen champions through Elinor. The paths, however, that Austen takes to bring Marianne to a more decorous affective state are of a paradoxically violent nature. There is violence not only in Marianne's near-death experience but also in the haunting specter of Willoughby. Willoughby's drunken remorse and Austen's inclusion of his unhappiness directly following the marriage of Marianne and Brandon increase the romantic tensions of the novel just as those tensions begin to dissipate. Another facet of Austen's irony is how she uses that which she seems to dissuade her readers from: the melodramatic methods of amatory fiction are integral corrective forces to the amatory affects of her characters.

[399] Austen, 380.
[400] Austen, 380.

In *Persuasion*, Austen wields her regulated violence again as Louisa Musgrave's fall serves as a plot device that aborts the intimacy between Louisa and Captain Wentworth, thus allowing Wentworth and Anne's former relationship the space to rekindle. Louisa is first introduced against her sister, Henrietta, and in relation to Wentworth's interest in marrying one of them. "Which of the two sisters was preferred by Captain Wentworth was as yet quite doubtful, as far as Anne's observation reached. Henrietta was perhaps the prettiest, Louisa had the higher spirits."[401] Louisa's liveliness is notable given how her personality contrasts with Anne's. Much later, Anne considers how, if Louisa recovers from her injury, she would once again fill the room she occupies with "all that was happy and gay, all that was glowing and bright in prosperous love, all that was most unlike Anne Elliot!"[402] Leading up to Louisa's fall, Anne assumes Louisa and Wentworth are on the path to marriage. "Everything now marked out Louisa for Captain Wentworth; nothing could be plainer." [403] Louisa's fall takes place while she and Wentworth, amongst a group of others, playfully walk along the stone pier in Lyme. "[A]ll were contented to pass quietly and carefully down the steep flight, excepting Louisa; she must be jumped down them by Captain Wentworth."[404] Louisa's insistence on walking in a playful, even childish manner, reflects her exuberant personality; similarly, Wentworth "advised her against it," in tandem with his comparably restrained manner.[405] Louisa is the point of excess in *Persuasion*, her character emitting too much energetic emotion. She is "too precipitate" in jumping and she falls onto the pavement.[406] Upon falling, Louisa is "lifeless! There was no wound, no blood, no

[401] Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Linda Bree, Broadview Literary Texts (Peterborough, Ont. ; Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1998), 107.
[402] Austen, 147.
[403] Austen, 119.
[404] Austen, 137.
[405] Austen, 138.
[406] Austen, 138.

visible bruise; but her eyes were closed, she breathed not, her face was like death."[407] There is no sign Louisa has suffered an injury, other than her dissipated life force. Her lifeless form is made all the more startling given her effusive nature.

Following Louisa's fall, the scene descends into chaotic horror that Anne helps control; Anne's temperament is the foil to Louisa's in this moment, displaying to the reader and Wentworth an ideal exterior of calmness despite internal panic. Anne and Captain Benwick rush to Louisa's aid, while the rest of the party is paralyzed. Anne becomes the master of the situation; it is Anne whom Benwick "obeyed" and Anne who calls for a surgeon, which "seemed to rouse [Wentworth] at once" from his panicked cries.[408] Wentworth, recognizing Anne's self-command under stress, commends her repeatedly.

> "[B]ut if Anne will stay, no one so proper, so capable as Anne."
>
> She paused a moment to recover from the emotion of hearing herself so spoken of.
>
> The other two warmly agreed with what he said, and she then appeared.
>
> "You will stay, I am sure; you will stay and nurse her;" cried he, turning to her and speaking with a glow, and yet a gentleness, which seemed almost restoring the past.[409]

Wentworth's language suggests the scene projects him and Anne back to their former intimacy. Yet despite this, Anne's concern for Louisa and Wentworth's connection continues given Wentworth's emotional response to Louisa's injury. The violence of the scene pushes characters like Captain Wentworth to a heightened display of emotion wherein propriety is discarded. In this moment of pure emotion, Anne witnesses Wentworth's emotion for Louisa.

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[407] Austen, 138.
[408] Austen, 138.
[409] Austen, 141–42.

> The tone, the look, with which "Thank God!" was uttered by Captain Wentworth, Anne was sure could never be forgotten by her; nor the sight of him afterwards, as he sat near a table, leaning over it with folded arms and face concealed, as if overpowered by the various feelings of his soul, and trying by prayer and reflection to calm them.[410]

Austen's narratorial voice obscures a clear reading of why this particular reaction of Wentworth's engrains itself in Anne's memory. The intensity of Wentworth's emotions strikes Anne. How they strike her is ambiguous: is the ability of Wentworth to feel so deeply and be in such pain what moves Anne, or is it the fact that Louisa's endangerment prompted this reaction in Wentworth?

Happily, however, for Anne and readers alike, Louisa Musgrave's fall displaces her from the running for Captain Wentworth's attention and Louisa's injury leads directly to her union with Captain Benwick. The news of the pair's engagement is "almost too wonderful for belief" for Anne, because she has suspected an intimacy between Louisa and Wentworth.[411] Her emotional reaction not only underscores her feelings for Wentworth but also the significance of the injury to Louisa's and Anne's narratives. Prior to this unexpected engagement, Anne assumes that Louisa's return to health would result in the continuation of extant relationships. "If Louisa recovered, it would all be well again. More than former happiness would be restored. There could not be a doubt, to her mind there was none, of what would follow her recovery."[412] Anne's speculation of Louisa's recovery and the shocking turn Louisa's narrative takes displays how violence and emotional intensity rupture the logic of time in Austen. Anne struggles to understand the intimacy between Louisa and Benwick:

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[410] Austen, 140.
[411] Austen, 184.
[412] Austen, 147.

> The high-spirited, joyous-talking Louisa Musgrove, and the dejected, thinking, feeling, reading, Captain Benwick, seemed each of them everything that would not suit the other. Their minds most dissimilar! Where could have been the attraction? The answer soon presented itself. It had been in situation.[413]

Anne's confusion and ultimate understanding presents a novel approach to romance. Louisa and Benwick were affectively incompatible; they did not experience an amatory intensity full of darting looks and panting sighs. Rather, their situation, or their lived experiences and proximity to each other, facilitated their compatibility. This compatibility only became possible once Louisa had lost her excessive, or amatory, spirits. This dynamic is mirrored in Anne and Wentworth's relationship. They can only marry once their socio-economic situations and not merely their affective intensities synchronize.

Sympathy in Austen blends aspects of her amatory and sentimental predecessors, while also excising aspects of their signature styles. Amatory fiction's novel emphasis on feminine desire carries into Austen, as does the necessity of mitigating the social harms of these desires with rational thinking. Though the epistemological texture of this mediation changes, the general conceit of empiricism remains. As, too, does the acknowledgement of gender and state politics—though Austen's political references are much more subtle. This subtly also describes Austen's ironic style. With her tiers of meaning, Austen collapses amatory fiction's satirical flair and passive obedience into her ironic style. Amatory sympathy, as in Austen, plays upon this "collusive resistance," as Toni Bowers refers to the genre's use of passive obedience. From amatory to domestic, the heroine achieves sympathy by framing her intentions according to the social ideal of femininity. Sentimentalism likewise uses this framework, though sentimentalism

[413] Austen, 186.

relocates emotional intensity away from amatory fiction's theatrical sensualism and toward an internal ethical exploration. Through its emotional rather than sensual stakes, sentimental genre emphasizes social ethics in the conceit of feminine virtue. Contrastingly, amatory fiction's ideal feminine virtue seems defined only through the heroine's chastity. The domestic is even more concerned with social ethics, and its characters' internal machinations. The erotics of romance becomes a process of understanding the lovers' interiority, and sympathizing with their perspective. The hero is not exempt: Wentworth, Brandon, and Edward all develop sympathetic understanding, and partake in the sympathy contract. Nonetheless, more is demanded of the heroine. She confronts her essentialized feminine excess and modulates herself into the acceptable register of feminine excess, which remains sutured to class. The heroine must assimilate ideologically to fulfill her supplicating role in the sympathy contract.

Chapter 3: Gatekeep; or, The Comforting Tears of White Femininity

White women's tears

"White women tears are especially potent and extra salty because they are attached to the symbol of femininity," Luvvie Ajayi writes on her blog, Awesomely Luvvie.[414] "These tears are pouring out from the eyes of the one chosen to be the prototype of womanhood; the woman who has been painted as helpless against the whims of the world. The one who gets the most protection in a world that does a shitty job overall of cherishing women."[415] Ajayi titled this 2018 blog post "About the Weary Weaponizing of White Women Tears," a phrase that was popularized in the following years.

Over a century before, tears acquired this social power through the sentimental novel, in which tears became the trope for signaling a character's ethical feelings. "When eighteenth-century people reflected on the causes and meanings of tears, they thought of them as effects, marks, signs, or testimony of passions, affections, or feelings, as well as of thoughts, considerations, and ideas," Thomas Dixon writes in *Weeping in Space*.[416] Romance was at the heart of the sentimental novel, making tears the crux of true love. Lynn Festa writes that in sentimental novels, when lovers realize the mutuality of their love, that "moment of recognition is not the pronouncing of another's name—romance's revelation of a shared noble identity—but tears, the performed sign of sensibility in response to a shared object of pity."[417] Festa reads the progressive potential of sentimentalism, whereas I read its collapse. She writes that the lovers' realization of feeling "creates a community in romance [that] does not uphold the hierarchy of

[414] Luvvie Ajayi, "About the Weary Weaponizing of White Women Tears," *Awesomely Luvvie* (blog), April 18, 2018, https://awesomelyluvvie.com/2018/04/weaponizing-white-women-tears.html.
[415] Ajayi.
[416] Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 138.
[417] Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, 2009, 56.

power necessary to conduct colonial policy."[418] She argues as such because of sentimentalism's individualist ethos. "Because the sentimental distinguishes the subject who feels from the object who produces feeling, it can create the semblance of similitude while maintaining categorical distinctions."[419] Festa—like Mallipeddi in his reading colonized peoples' appropriation of sentimental rhetoric—focuses on romance narratives or non-romantic sentimental texts that have more direct lines to colonial settings than my corpus, in which white characters dominate the narrative within imperial mainland.[420]

This is the narrative setting for Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, novels at the heart of the sentimental movement. Albert Rivero writes that *Pamela* "served as the catalyst for the [sentimental] literary movement" and *Clarissa* is "often cited as the first fully sentimental novel in English."[421] In *Pamela*, the eponymous serving maid rebuffs the dogmatic advances of her new master, Mr. B.. Pamela's resistance to his predatory overtures and rape attempts are increasingly alluring to Mr. B's sadism, and his purely sexual attraction evolves into romantic interest. Convinced of each other's virtuosness, the couple marry. *Clarissa* heightens *Pamela*'s violence, both sexually and emotionally. Clarissa overflows with emotion as the eponymous heroine details the various abuses of her kidnapper and rapist, Richard Lovelace, in an epistolary form that extends for hundreds and hundreds of pages. Clarissa continually finds fault in herself in a traumatic example of victim blaming. "These tears seemingly perform a self-baptism. They cleanse the sufferer of any past wrongs and invest her with a martyred authority flowing from the realm of allegedly indisputable truth: her own hurt feelings," Kyla Schuller writes, regarding the

[418] Festa, 56.
[419] Festa, 56.
[420] Nonetheless, I disagree somewhat with their readings.
[421] Albert J. Rivero, *The Sentimental Novel in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Albert J. Rivero, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108292375.

trope of white women's tears she traces to nineteenth-century American enslavement narratives, notably *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[422] But the meaning holds true for Clarissa, too, although in a much different context. Seemingly unrelated, *Clarissa* and the eighteenth-century romance form feeds into the sentimentality and ensuing white feminism of white women's tears that continue to trickle through society.

The construction of the ideal heroine in the romance form scaffolds the metonymic meaning of these tears. As she progresses through the century, the romance heroine consumes subversive affective elements from genres like amatory, sentimental, and domestic romances fictions. The political and erotic allure of the heroine consistently rests in her passivity, through which she fulfills the sympathy contract by acquiring the sympathy of her hero and readers. The romance form ties together this affective characterization of its heroines with British ideologies of class, virtue, and beauty, such that the heroine embodies the ideal of white femininity: wealthy in fortune or ethics, a pale pallor perfect for sporting an English rose blush, a frame so petite men hardly feel her weight when she faints, and a dash of victimhood that shows off her willingness to defer to men and find fault in herself.

This woman's white femininity is not innately racist or sexist; the harms of this white femininity come through a cultural romanticization, wherein her idealization disbars other women from playing the heroine. Similarly, in the real world, white femininity tips into white feminism when these attributes of white femininity are used in the name of a feminism that only considers gender oppression within the terms of whiteness. White feminism asserts the superiority of white femininity over subaltern peoples and strives for proximity to the ruling class of white men. White feminism gatekeeps emotions from non-white women to retain a

[422] Kyla Schuller, *The Trouble with White Women: A Counterhistory of Feminism*, First edition (New York: Bold Type Books, 2021), 80.

higher position in the racial hierarchy. I locate an origin of this gatekeeping within the sympathy contract, specifically through the racialization and gendering of the sympathy contract in novellas from Delarivier Manley, Penelope Aubin, and Eliza Haywood, Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817)[423] and *Mansfield Park* (1814). These texts and their cultural significance tell the story of how romantic sympathy becomes intertwined with gender, nation, and race such that the English romance novel contributes to Anglo-American whiteness through the racialization and gendering of feeling.

In *White Tears/Brown Scars*, Ruby Hamad reads white women's tears as strategic White Womanhood, wherein the realities of systemic oppression are sidestepped in favor of a personal emotive reaction that upholds normative hierarchies of whiteness. "Strategic White Womanhood is a spectacle that permits the actual issue at hand to take a back seat to the emotions of the white woman, with the convenient effect that the status quo continues."[424] In *Me, Not You: The Trouble with Mainstream Feminism*, Phipps applies the extant concept of political whiteness[425] to white femininity's relationship to sexual violence, specifically regarding the #MeToo movement. Leveraging Clare Hemming's study of feminism's political grammar,[426] Phipps argues that political whiteness provides the grammatical paradigm for white feminism and the weaponization of white feminism against intersectional feminism in the twenty-first century. Political whiteness, she writes is **"produced by the interaction between supremacy and**

[423] Although published in 1817, *Northanger Abbey* was Austen's first novel and was completed in 1803.
[424] Ruby Hamad, *White Tears/Brown Scars: How White Feminism Betrays Women of Color* (New York: Catapult, 2020), 126.
[425] Phipps acknowledges the pre-existence of this term, specifically in Daniel HoSang's work. Daniel HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California*, American Crossroads 30 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
[426] Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Next Wave (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

victimhood."[427] White feminists orient themselves as victims and, through claiming sympathy, gain proximity to white supremacy. Phipps writes, "White feminist tears deploy white woundedness, and the sympathy it generates, to hide the harms we perpetrate through white supremacy."[428] White supremacy reads white women as victims who require protection from the Other, even when they themselves are committing harm. Sympathy, particularly public sympathy, is central to white feminism. Sympathy's fomentation as the proper affective response to the victimhood of white women is displayed throughout eighteenth-century romance fictions.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the sympathy contract mandates that one must engage in sympathy to claim citizenship within Enlightenment-era political models. The romance genre's dependence on sympathy plays into this notion of sympathy as requisite for citizenship. The romance genre's allegiance to the sympathy contract engenders the romantic narrative as a location for citizenship. Thus, the romance narrative becomes closed off for those outside of the sympathy contract—namely, any person who does not affectively resonate with the ideals of white femininity. In this gatekeeping, eighteenth-century romances contribute to the soft supremacy that Lauren Berlant identifies in American women's culture.

This process begins with how amatory fiction, blending women's desire with political topics, politicized women's feelings within the contemporary paradigm of feelings that rendered feelings as separate agents to individuals. While both men and women fall prey to their emotions, the gendering of virtue meant women were granted less leeway in their eroticism. The rhetoric of passive obedience becomes a means for heroines to acknowledge but not pursue their feelings of

[427] Alison Phipps, *Me, Not You: The Trouble with Mainstream Feminism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 6.
[428] Phipps, 70.

lust and love, and thus push the boundaries of propriety. Heroines locate the boundaries for readers, allowing the reader to dabble in an erotic experience before the heroine falls back. The bulk of the heroine's narrative is caught in this vacillation between her erotic whims and her established values—neither of which are even really "hers," given that feelings are gendered elsewhere and she inherits her values from her socio-culture influences. The romance form contains its heroines in a liminal space defined by entities beyond her. Constantly pursued by seduction, on the one hand, and the requirement of propriety, on the other, the heroine is lost to both. Those seductive forces could be her sexual desire, a suitor's erotic interest, or a rake's violent desire; propriety, on the other end, is defined through maintaining a respectable virtue that is perfect with a socially advantageous marriage. The heroine is dropped into scenarios where eroticism and matrimony ambush her (as a heroine is rarely defined by her desire to marry). Her only option is to navigate events as they jump out at her. She, ideally for her personal interests and the reader's enjoyment, remains within that liminality. She does this through reacting to events, positioning herself as an inert object that these forces cannot move, allowing them to pass over her until they meet. The heroine, like the neoliberal white feminist, preserves her status by abandoning her fate to the battle between unrestrained feeling and ethical propriety. Acquiescing to expectation, she is passive. And so, too, is the neoliberal white feminist, who envisions herself in a parallel trap, but a trap that she has devised and rigged. Marginalization and dominance, represented by subaltern populations and white patriarchy, are the threats against her. Her tears are a reaction to an imagined danger, and are proof that she is the passive heroine deserving of that comfortable ending in social propriety.

Both the early eighteenth-century's appeal to the sentiments and neoliberalism's emphasis on the individual orient woman's agency around *reacting*. Recall how passive obedience shifted

from “the right to resist” to “the right to oppose.”[429] The difference between resistance and opposition, in this categorization, is epistemological. Both are movements of deviation tied to feeling, in terms of a desire for change. Resistance, however, implies an ethical motivation that opposition does not in terms of passive obedience: resisting an unjust monarch, versus opposing the government in power. And in arriving at this ethical viewpoint, resistance requires a progression of critical thinking. Opposition, however, is simply against something—objecting for the sake of objecting. Opposition originates through a pre-existing object. While opposition is against an object, resistance originates in seeing beyond the pre-existing object: believing that there is something lost, unseen, or imagined that is worth fighting for. Resistance exemplifies my understanding of “active agency,” and opposition is “passive agency.” In active agency, an individual manifests action derived from outside of their immediate purview; in passive agency, an individual manifests action solely in relation to their circumstances. Passive agency is reactive. A passive agent reacts so as to parrot the ideologies at hand, such as Glanville’s disgust at the thought of aiding a sex worker, or Miss Glanville’s jealousy of Arabella because of her loyalty to seeing marriage as a competitive market. Within both the liberal sphere of eighteenth-century romances and neoliberalism today, women’s societal engagement and self-awareness is constructed in terms of reactive feelings, meaning personhood is defined through oppositional, passive agency stemming from those reactive feelings.

Moreover, akin to sympathy, that opposition is constructed through the individual and that individual’s disavowal of action. The individual plight takes precedent over the collective. Consider Kimberlé Crenshaw’s scene of the basement filled with people, which Crenshaw uses

[429] Brett D. Wilson, *A Race of Female Patriots: Women and Public Spirit on the British Stage, 1688-1745*, Transits: Literature, Thought & Culture, 1650-1850 (Lewisburg [Pa.]: Bucknell University Press, co-published with The Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Group, 2012), 213 n 37.

to describe intersectionality and how western hegemony marginalizes various identity aspects. The basement's ceiling serves as the floor for the room above, which only individuals not facing oppression can access. The basement is crowded with individuals facing an array of oppressions that result in a subaltern status that tethers them to the basement. Standing on top of and next to each other, everyone is arranged according to how the non-marginalized perceive them. The basement's ceiling has a hatch door to the space above. Those nearest the door and the possibilities offered in the room above are the individuals who are the least marginalized and thus most akin to the ideal subjects living above. It is "but for" singular aspects, namely gender, that these near-ideal identities are excluded.[430] Crenshaw writes that this mechanism of escape "is generally available only to those who—due to the singularity of their burden and their otherwise privileged position relative to those below—are in the position to crawl through."[431] By this, Crenshaw refers most directly to white upper-class women safeguarded from further marginalization by class, appearance, education, sexuality, mental and physical abilities, and nationality. After securing their proximity to whiteness, these women deny others the opportunity to ascend by upholding the structures that initially oppressed them. Crenshaw's image speaks to the dual individualistic and collectivist mindset that perpetuate hierarchies of Otherness for the sake of personal gain. This is the mindset of passive obedience, whereby one can fault the structures in place and claim internal discomfort as resistance. Amatory fiction establishes emotional reactions as a sufficient political response to structural harms, thereby permitting individual survival and perpetuating collective suppression. This dynamic is not innately racially

[430] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," no. 1 (1989): 151, http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.

[431] Crenshaw, 152.

charged or immoral. The broad cultural permissibility of this tactic in relation to white femininity is the racializing dynamic that is under consideration.

Describing neoliberal feminism Alison Phipps writes how whiteness is dependent on the (femininized) white subject enacting citizenship through victimhood.[432] Victimhood is central to amatory fiction and ensuing romances and seduction narratives. Reactive passivity imagines femininity as a victim of action, with feelings as the proper moral response that confirms individual agency. White femininity ontologizes passivity and hierarchy. It licenses white women to, as Beck describes in the opening of *White Feminism*, cry onscreen at the sight of racial violence and re-orient racial oppression towards themselves. These tears ironically depict the vacuity of whiteness. To elucidate the pre-history of white feminism that Hamad, Phipps, and Beck diagnose in today's world, I first consider the aftermath of seduction in amatory fiction's Violenta novella, from Delariver Manley, Penelope Aubin, and Eliza Haywood.

Victims of amatory whiteness

Josephine Donovan uses the term Violenta novella to describe the various retellings of a tale originating in Italian and French before William Painter's English translation appeared as "Didaco and Violenta" in his 1575 collection *Palace of Pleasure*.[433] In 1720, Delarivier Manley adapted the tale in her novella collection *The Power of Love* as "The Wife's Resentment". The tale features Violenta as a common Spanish lady whom the aristocratic Roderigo seduces into

[432] Alison Phipps, "White Tears, White Rage: Victimhood and (as) Violence in Mainstream Feminism," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 1, 2021): 83, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420985852.

[433] The tale appears as Novella 42 in Volume 1 of Matteo Bandello's *Novelle* (1554) and before Pierre Boaistuau's adaptation in *Histoires tragique* (1559). The first Spanish- and woman-authored version comes in María de Zayas's *Novelas amorosas* (1637) as "La burlada Aminta y venganza del honor." Ros Ballaster, who briefly addresses Manley's and Haywood's stories in *Seductive Forms*, introduced me to these stories. Josephine Donovan, *Women and the Rise of the Novel* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 96; Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, 153–54.

marriage; after he commits bigamy in a public marriage to a fellow aristocrat, Violenta violently murders Roderigo and publicly claims the act, which simultaneously results in her death sentence and a reclamation of her reputation. In 1721, Penelope Aubin adapted Manley's story within her novel *The Adventures of Lucinda*, which Debbie Welham convincingly argues is a mélange of Manley's works.[434] Aubin recasts Violenta as the more passive Panthea and Roderigo as the more conflicted Sebastian. Although Sebastian likewise commits bigamy, he is wracked with guilt; after his second wife bizarrely dies, he acknowledges Panthea as his wife, and the tale ends with Panthea's virtue preserved in marital bliss. Finally, I consider Eliza Haywood's 1727 version in a novella collection akin to Manley's titled *Love in its Variety*. In this take on the Violenta tale, the first wife Climene is overshadowed in virtue and beauty by Julia. Climene's emotional and sexual deviances, rather than her husband Bellcourt's amorous proclivities, undermine their marriage; Climene commits suicide while Julia and Bellcourt receive the happy ending.

Manley and Haywood, in keeping with amatory fiction's trademark blend of politics and romance, code their Violenta novellas in political terms. Their stories are deliberately set in politically turbulent times and, through the marriage plot, offer political commentary in relation to royal succession, the judicial system, and gender and class politics. With the centering of women's feelings in these narratives, Manley and Haywood likewise politicize those white women's feelings, while Aubin slyly mocks the erotic liberties of Manley with her conservative moralization. The Violenta novella provides a cohesive case study of amatory fiction, as the three stories provide us with the two categories of romantic heroines: the heroine who retains her virginity and the heroine who does not. Both heroine types, however, end their narratives as

[434] Debbie Welham, "The Political Afterlife of Resentment in Penelope Aubin's The Life and Amorous Adventures of Lucinda (1721)," *Women's Writing* 20, no. 1 (February 2013): 56, https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2013.754257.

virtuous women. The "ruined" woman is the victim of deceit or assault, and is consequently not a lost cause. Often, as with Violenta, she is vengefully virtuous. Victimhood disrupts the one-to-one relationship between virginity and virtue, as do beauty and decorum. Even in amatory fiction and increasingly over the century, virtue becomes an acquirable rather than innate state that allows a woman proximity to a higher social standing. Heroines in amatory works like the Violenta novellas fuse together this acquirable virtue and political import through their passivity. Such a fusion enables the heroine to gain proximity to an exclusive citizenry reserved for white men with social and economic power. This striving is the heroine's means of survival, and surviving in such a way sediments into an exclusion of other women. Resultingly, the romantic narrative is racialized, even when the heroine is foreign like Manley's Violenta.

Manley published *The Power of Love* collection in 1720, the same year Spain entered a tentative alliance with Britain and seven years after the Treaty of Utrecht, through which the South Sea Company acquired the right to traffic persons into chattel slavery in Spanish colonies for thirty years. Britain's engagement in chattel slavery, which Manley references in another novella, "The Physician's Stratagem," was already defining the imperial power.[435] Laura Brown argues in *Ends of Empire* that imperial mercantilism relies on the woman as a changeable figure of capitalism; this reading just falls short of asserting the commodified woman figure as integral in the crystallization of racial capitalism.[436] White femininity and its ability to access class, as in

[435] George Boulukos argues that Manley's tale is a reference to the infamous Inkle and Yarico tale that Richard Steele popularized. Aleksondra Hultquist also investigates Manley's use of the West Indies in the tale. George Boulukos, "Review Essay: Social Liberty and Social Death: Conceiving of Slavery Beyond the Black Atlantic," in *Invoking Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century British Imagination*, ed. Adam R Beach and Srividhya Swaminathan (London: Routledge, 2016), 175–90, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781315589787; Aleksondra Hultquist, "Creole Space: Jamaica, Fallen Women, and British Literature," in *Gender and Space in British Literature, 1660-1820*, ed. Mona Narain and Karen Bloom Gevirtz, British Literature in Context in the Long Eighteenth Century (Farnham, Surrey [England] ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 33–48.

[436] Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

Manley's "The Wife's Resentment" illustrates how modern gender traffics in racialization. Delarivier Manley's "The Wife's Resentment" exemplifies a model of virtue that foreshadows white feminism through the valorization of Violenta. Through her appearance and passivity, Violenta rises in class status. Because she publicly positions herself as a martyr through an emotional appeal, Violenta illustrates how passivity can purchase class ascension and public approbation, which allows victims to become perpetrators. This passive virtue that places power in exceptional individuals is, centuries later, a hallmark of white feminism.

Before naming Violenta, the narrator explicitly describes the white femininity of Violenta: "her Complexion, which was varnished by Nature with a Gloss shining like polish'd Marble, and whiter than Imagination, an uncommon Charm in *Spain*, and would, even in *England*, be looked upon as a very extraordinary Beauty."[437] Violenta transcends her Spanishness to gain proximity to Englishness and its ideals. Continuing with common tropes, Violenta's beauty encourages Roderigo's passion. Roderigo discovers Violenta sitting in her window like many other Spanish women in her laboring neighborhood. "She met his Looks in such a manner, that he thought a Pistol had been discharged at his Heart, he felt as hot and fatal a Fire."[438] Although this language destabilizes the expected class and gender hierarchies, it maintains the contemporary logic of passion.

Within contemporary logic, Violenta consistently maintains a passive agency and this passivity is the foundation of her virtue, which in turn demonstrates her femininity. Despite Roderigo's flatteries and Violenta's inferior position, she refuses to engage romantically with

[437] Delarivier Manley, *The Power of Love: In Seven Novels Viz. I. The Fair Hypocrite. II. The Physician's Stratagem. III. The Wife's Resentment. IV.V. The Husband's Resentment. In Two Examples. VI. The Happy Fugitives. VII. The Perjur'd Beauty. Never before Published.* (London: John Barber and John Morphew, 1720), link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0113299018/ECCO?u=nash87800&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=4328a9fa&pg=1.
[438] Manley, 177.

Roderigo. In a letter responding to Roderigo's epistolary advances, Violenta writes, "I would see the whole World in a Conflagration, and my self in the middle of it, before I could be brought to do any thing contrary to the Rules of Modesty."[439] Violenta's refusal of Roderigo's passions empowers her position; her *inaction* becomes the locus of her power and brings Roderigo to propose marriage.

Violenta's virtuous passivity continues in her marriage to Roderigo and structures her spousal identity. Manley again describes how Violenta exudes aristocratic Englishness, "In *Spain* they have other Maxims than in *England*, here a Person enobles his Wife, There, 'tis a Reproach for a Man of Quality and to his Descendants, if he chance to mingle with the People."[440] As Violenta allows Roderigo to "enoble" her through marriage, Violenta and Roderigo adhere to English rather than Spanish custom. Violenta exhibits a willingness to obey Roderigo, insisting upon their marriage "that he would prescribe Rules to her Conduct, assuring him, that she should be as diligent to observe his Orders, and as ambitious to please him in whatever he desired, as the poorest Slave."[441] Violenta's virtue is a form of social reputation that pivots on gender and preservation. Violenta's successful preservation of her womanly virtue enables her access to class and rank through Roderigo. She writes to Roderigo, "That which Courage is to your Sex, Chastity is to ours, and indeed more, since the greatest Cowardice is retrievable by one Act of Valour, but Modesty is rarely or never to be regain'd."[442] A woman's virtue cannot accrue positive value, nor should it accrue negative value. Instead, a woman's virtue should remain as it always was: unblemished, or unmarked in a socio-culturally nebulous manner—a codification akin to whiteness. Violenta's virtue takes shape when she reacts to Roderigo's advances. Virtue

[439] Manley, 183.
[440] Manley, 184.
[441] Manley, 196.
[442] Manley, 181.

cannot act; rather, virtue can only *react*, and ideally that reactionary move is one that preserves virtue.

Violenta's virtue comes to emphasize an emotional rather than rational logic. Bored of Violenta, Roderigo marries another woman. The novella, in keeping with amatory fiction's guiding principle of erotic excess, languishes within Violenta's frenzied feeling of revenge. Upon learning of his bigamy, Violenta's mental state descends into emotive reactions.

> The Sense of Honour lost, of her Vertue demolish'd, her Chastity overthrown, her ruin'd Reputation swell'd her to an Extremity of Resentment, she tore her Ornaments, her Dress, her Hair, she stamp'd, and travers'd her Apartment like a raging *Bacchanal*, like *Medea*, furious in her Revenge.[443]

With wrong done to her, Violenta enters the pantheon of other heroically vengeful women. Violenta allows her feelings to victimize her. Revenge—a reactive feeling and action—consumes Violenta. "All the Furies of Hell entred like a Torrent in her Breast, and in a Moment expell'd her native Softness. Love hid his Face and would be seen no more."[444] Violenta's virtue and, by extension, Violenta are victims of Roderigo. Incited by external events, the feelings Violenta experiences are categorizable as passions and are passive in orientation. Violenta is also passive, as she becomes subject to her passions. Reactivity in the form of revenge overtakes her. "At length, Nature, unable longer to maintain so cruel a War against it self, suffered this wretched Creature to sink down."[445] Violenta's relationship to her virtue and her acceptance of vengeance is no longer attached to reason: "Reason was utterly lost upon her, she was insensible to all things but Revenge, which she insatiably thirsted after."[446] Violenta, however, conflates

[443] Manley, 206.
[444] Manley, 206.
[445] Manley, 207.
[446] Manley, 208.

reason and feeling: "Reason it self supports me in my Desire of Vengeance!"[447] In seeking revenge, Violenta confirms her position as victim and channels her identity into this singular emotion. Violenta allows vengeance for her virtue to become her guiding principle, prioritizing emotional over cognitive logic.

Aiding the recently ennobled Violenta with her revenge is Ianthe, an enslaved African woman. Ianthe first seeks to defuse Violenta's rage, offering to speak directly with Roderigo. Violenta insists on violence, though, and requests Ianthe's help. Violenta offers Ianthe the money and jewelry Roderigo bestowed on her. Ianthe agrees to assist Violenta based on several factors. Ianthe is "potently mov'd at [Violenta's] being defam'd and dishonour'd by the pretence of Marriage, and partly prompted by Covetousness and the desire of Liberty" that Violenta's money could afford her.[448] Ianthe ultimately masterminds Violenta's revenge, instructing her to send a false letter that lures Roderigo to her bed. Ianthe leaves Roderigo's dagger for Violenta to murder him, as "the Slave thought the Justice would be more remarkable if he fell by his own Weapon."[449] When Roderigo struggles against Violenta's attack, Ianthe holds him down.

Instead of soothing her passions through reflective examination, Violenta proliferates her passions through orientating her agency in victimhood. "Her Rage rather increased than abated" and she volubly decries Roderigo's actions while ravaging his body.[450] Violenta maps her excessively violent emotions onto Roderigo, carving out his organs. Her language declares the murder as the result of Roderigo's failings: "now thou art repaid as thy Merits did deserve."[451]

[447] Manley, 209.
[448] Manley, 133.
[449] Manley, 138.
[450] Manley, 221.
[451] Manley, 222.

Revenge and virtue collaborate to orchestrate this chain of action and argue that the driving force behind Violenta is the actions of Roderigo.

Having imprinted her emotive ethics onto Roderigo's body, Violenta reveals her revenge to the public and evokes public sympathy—the integral dynamic of white feminism. Violenta and Ianthe throw Roderigo's mutilated body onto the street. Violenta instructs Ianthe to flee to Africa, as she had planned. The portrayal of Ianthe confirms the narrative belongs to the white Violenta. Ianthe exits the narrative, leaving Violenta to claim Roderigo's murder as her own action. Violenta's violent performance of her femininity invisibly leverages the assistance of the enslaved Ianthe. Violenta declares to the crowd amassing around Roderigo's dismembered body, "Since my Vertue is traduced abroad, my Revenge shall be as manifest, and this Carcass be exposed as publicly as was my Reputation."[452] Rather than immediately divulge her actions, Violenta withholds information, building curiosity and accruing attention. Brought forth in a public trial before a second crowd of magistrates and citizens, Violenta openly claims her actions. Her performance in this trial is akin to the beautiful appearance of Behn's Isabella when she took the stage for her execution. Violenta "glow'd with the Pride of some worthy Action performed" as she announces to a crowd of onlookers, "my Purpose was to have my honour as publickly cleared as it was aspersed, for a Terror to all young Virgins, how they receive the Addresses of Persons so greatly above them."[453] Violenta depicts herself as a martyr, positioning her emotional fury as an ennobling deed she has taken on for the sake of other women. This individualistic exceptionalism works wonders on the crowd. Upon learning the full story of Roderigo's deceit, the emotions of all spectators shift from disgust to pity.

[452] Manley, 223.
[453] Manley, 225, 226.

The trial pivots to Roderigo's crimes. "The People were so far moved with Pity that they wept with luke-warm Tears, to think so fair and chast a Creature should meet with such great Misfortunes. Detesting the Memory of Count Roderigo, they thought his Death too small an Expiation for a Wretch."[454] The inciting logic of this shift is Violenta's emotions and the emotional *reaction* she prompts. The "luke-warm Tears" of the crowd signal not merely pity but also sympathy as the citizens themselves enter the emotional frame of Violenta. Like Violenta, their bodies are moved to act. Like Violenta, the crowd develops antipathy against Roderigo. That antipathy outweighs Violenta's actions in the eyes of crowd because the citizens, like Violenta, understand Violenta's crimes as a reaction to Roderigo's. Thus, the actions of Violenta are secondary to the emotive response that Roderigo incites. The public seeks to intervene in the judicial system because of their emotions. "*Violenta*, notwithstanding the Pity of the People, the Intercession of the Ladies, and the Applause of her Chastity and Magnanimity deserved, was condemned to be Beheaded."[455] Though Violenta is sentenced to death, she restores her virtue through her public victimhood.

Violenta restores her virtue because she operates within the emotive expectations of the same ideologies that Roderigo deployed against her. Kirsten Saxton considers how Manley depicts a system that only allows for agency defined through the body: "Manley attacks the hyperbolic qualities of stereotypical figurations of femininity and calls attention to the futility of a system in which female identity is defined solely by mythologized body status."[456] Acting as the embodiment of emotional revenge, Violenta performs gendered tropes. Because she ultimately adhered to the norms of passive feeling, the system sanctions Violenta's feelings

[454] Manley, 227.
[455] Manley, 228.
[456] Kirsten T. Saxton, *Narratives of Women and Murder in England, 1680-1760: Deadly Plots* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 50.

through public sympathy and condemnation of Roderigo. Whereas Saxton clearly sees Violenta as exerting active agency, I insist on the passivity intertwined in Violenta's passionate logic. Her feelings and her understanding of virtue propel Violenta to react to Roderigo. She ensures the narrative remains in her control through emotionally charged actions that underscore her exceptional status. Because she is such an exceptional woman, Violenta can access public sympathy that recuperates her virtue. This recuperation based on her singularity is born of the same heteronormative logic that informs Violenta's sense of virtue. Manley appropriates the heroic narrative for gendered concerns but continues to have her heroine operate within the bounds of normative virtue and aristocratic citizenship. Manley narrativizes the social agency of white women and, like white feminism, her Violenta upholds systemic boundaries but manipulates emotional responses to maintain secondary status to the dominant class of privileged white men.

The foil to Manley and Haywood in the amatory fiction market, Aubin does not allow her European women to luxuriate in erotic desire. Ros Ballaster and Aparna Gollapudi both use the term "militant" to describe Aubin's depictions of respectable women. Ballaster writes, "[Aubin's stories] cohabit with more overtly sententious interventions by a narrator keen to extol the values and virtues of a militant Christian heroism often contrasted with orient despotism and proving God's merciful providentialism."[457] Gollapudi, describing the moment Maria removes her eyeballs in *The Noble Slaves* (1722) to preserve virtue in the face of a Persian monarch's rape attempt, "This outrageously sensational narrative moment articulates Aubin's conception of female heroism as an almost surreally militant chastity, constantly under attack in the far-off

[457]Ros Ballaster, "Sensible Readers: Experiments in Feeling in Early Prose Fictions by Women," in *The Sentimental Novel in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Albert J. Rivero, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 45, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108292375.

lands to which her heroines travel."[458] Blending greater violence and stricter virtue than Haywood or Manley, Aubin turns the heroines of her travel narratives into fierce victims. Under constant assault from the sexual desires of men or the pressures of familial greed, characters like Panthea from Aubin's Violenta retelling diligently protect their virtue. *Aubin's The Adventures of Lucinda*, which heavily mirrors Manley's works including *The Power of Love*, introduces slavery after the recently widowed and destitute Lucinda agrees to marry the Spanish captain Don Antonio. In *Lucinda*, Barbary privateers attack Don Antonio's ship, resulting in his death and Lucinda's enslavement. Aubin offers the most direct ties to racialization through the enslavement of Lucinda in the frame narrative. Rather than derail her amorous journey, as is the case in *The Noble Slaves*, Lucinda's enslavement propels her love story to its culmination. This is because Lucinda is coincidentally enslaved alongside her first love, with whom she ultimately returns to England. The privateers attack while Don Antonio is regaling Lucinda with the inset narrative "Conjugal Duty Rewarded; or, The Rake Reform'd." "Conjugal Duty" subverts the Violenta narrative such that the public reputation of the first wife is recuperated without any violence, or action generally.

In "Conjugal Duty," Panthea passively obeys both her family and her bigamous husband by performing familial duty while enacting her marital vow. The tale diverges from Manley's after the husband, Sebastian in Aubin's version, commits bigamy. Like Violenta, Panthea laments her situation; unlike Violenta, Panthea's passions are directed towards herself, and her family sparks the idea of violent revenge. "Oh poor unhappy *Panthea*," she exclaims.[459] Her self-pity moves quickly but briefly to Sebastian, whom she sees as "faithless" and "false."[460] Panthea

[458] Gollapudi, "Virtuous Voyages in Penelope Aubin's Fiction," 669.
[459] Penelope Aubin, *The Life and Amorous Adventures of Lucinda, an English Lady*, 1722, 65, https://archive.org/details/lifeamorousadven03aubi.
[460] Aubin, 65.

turns against her body, the very thing that attracted Sebastian's passion in the first place. "Off from my Head ye treacherous Locks."[461] Panthea is a victim not only of Sebastian but also of her own bodily attractions. She seeks revenge against her beauty. "If there be a Line, a single Feature, in this once admired Face, it is a Traytor, a Conspirator, and has helped me to the Wretch that has undone me; with these Nails I'll dig, and bury them in the bloody Furrows of my Cheeks, as deep as the Treachery of my faithless Husband."[462] Panthea's mother interrupts this scene, telling her daughter that although her marriage secures her honor legally, revenge should take place. Panthea demurs against her mother, telling her, "he is my Husband: I'll bear my Wrongs with conjugal Obedience, preserve my Innocence with Patience, keep my sacred Vows, and love the Villain to the last."[463] The mother "was surprized at, and admired her forgiving Temper, wondring how one proceeding from *Spanish* Parents, could be enduced with such Mildness and Godness [sic]."[464] With this detail, Aubin reminds us that Panthea's exceptionalism is, as in Manley's tale, more akin to innate English femininity. Panthea's mother and two brothers, forge ahead with their revenge and decide to lure Sebastian into a murderous trap through a seductive letter that they force Panthea to write. Panthea pens the letter despite finding the plan "very detestable" because she knows her family will enact revenge no matter what.[465] Yet, Panthea obliges both her family and her husband. Sebastian receives the letter, in addition to a second letter Panthea wrote in secret. This second letter reveals her family's violent plan as well as her conflicted feelings. "My Heart is not so warm to invite you to my despised Embraces,

[461] Aubin, 65–66.
[462] Aubin, 65–66.
[463] Aubin, 67.
[464] Aubin, 68.
[465] Aubin, 70.

nor my Temper so cruel to tempt you to this treacherous Snare."[466] With this honesty, Panthea reveals her steadfastness.

Panthea enacts passive obedience for the sake of her virtue, thus framing gendered virtue as an ethical duty. Panthea's letter to Sebastian warning him of her family's vengeful plan stokes Sebastian's sentiments. At first happy for escaping, Sebastian begins to view his actions critically against the selflessness of Panthea. "These kind Thoughts of her began to revive the glowing Embers of his former Passion."[467] Despite his rekindled sentiments, Sebastian chooses the path of least resistance and commits himself to his new wife. After this new wife dies, Sebastian returns to his first wife with an offer of a public marriage; Panthea instead requests that Sebastian acknowledge their initial marriage. She explains that in so doing, both of their virtues are protected because otherwise the public will think she was sexually intimate with Sebastian prior to marriage. Aubin writes, "those who suspected *Panthea*'s Virtue, were mistaken Censurers. The unkind usage she had suffered made her shine the brighter."[468] As in Manley's tale, virtue is restored through public approval. Debbie Welham, comparing Manley's and Aubin's versions, likewise reads Panthea in terms of passive obedience.[469] Welham writes, "We might shudder at Panthea's lack of agency. But, if we look at Panthea's actions in the context of a comparison with Manley's Violenta, it is also possible to see that Panthea's real strength of character lies in her doing nothing."[470] Joseph Donovan similarly writes that Aubin's story "portrays the protagonist as a weak, passive collaborator, further evidence of the changing ideological climate and weakening feminist authority noted above."[471] These authors position Manley's Violenta in direct

[466] Aubin, 72.
[467] Aubin, 77.
[468] Aubin, 81.
[469] Welham, "The Political Afterlife of Resentment in Penelope Aubin's The Life and Amorous Adventures of Lucinda (1721)," 56.
[470] Welham, 56.
[471] Donovan, *Women and the Rise of the Novel*, 197 n 14.

opposition to Aubin's Panthea, whereas I am arguing that *both* operate through the same logic of reactive passivity. Though their narrative actions differ, the impetuses are the same. This passivity is the crux of feminine survival in amatory fiction and white feminism in our contemporary moment. White feminism operates in parallel subterfuge to passive obedience, insofar as it likewise publicly proclaims certain affinities while upholding different relations in actuality. The tears of white women proclaim support for marginalized peoples, but in truth work to support white women's racialized power *over* those same people. This happens through an insistence on white femininity, born from the eighteenth-century form.

While Aubin typically used Barbary Coast slavery to advertise the liberties of English society and to promote virtuous chastity, other amatory writers invoked chattel slavery to describe the social conditions of British women. Annie Persons reads Eliza Haywood's La Belle Assemblée (1724) through Moira Ferguson's reading of enslavement as a rhetorical tool for white women's empowerment. Persons examines at length an inset narrative following Fatyma, who is introduced as a "Criminal Negro" because she kidnaps her male charge and later assaults his future wife.[472] *Persons argues that with this story, "*Haywood seems to want both to highlight the presence of empire in elite British culture while appropriating the position of an enslaved woman to both describe the 'captive' positions of white, European women and offer models of resistance to that oppression."[473] Haywood's invocation of slavery maps onto Ferguson's argument that, "**the historical intersection of a feminist impulse with anti-slavery agitation helped secure white British women's political self-empowerment."**[474] Ferguson

[472] Annie Persons, "Translation and Empire in Haywood's La Belle Assemblée," in *A Spy on Eliza Haywood*, by Aleksondra Hultquist and Chris Mounsey, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2021), 178, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003198000-9.
[473] Persons, 171–72.
[474] Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 6.

reads Haywood's *Philidore and Placentia* (1719), *The Female Spectator* (1742-44), and *The Parrot* (1746), in addition to a lengthier examination of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688), amongst others. Ferguson's readings describe the same power dynamic of white feminism, wherein white women repudiate their oppression through further marginalizing others, specifically racialized populations. Ferguson writes, "**Women mediated their own needs and desires, their unconscious sense of social invalidation, through representations of the colonial other, who in the process became more severely objectified and marginalized—a silent or silenced individual in need of protection and pity who must always remain 'under control.'"**[475] **Persons not only cites Ferguson but also cites white feminism** to describe Haywood's *La Belle Assemblée*.

> Haywood's use of markers of empire and, particularly, an enslaved woman of color to critique the oppression of white, British women urges us to consider the degree to which her feminism—and the emergence of white feminism in Britain more broadly—depended in part upon a strategic use of the stereotypes and associations of enslavement.[476]

The appearance of white feminism in Haywood's Violenta tale that I examine here is less explicit. The first wife, Climene, is not racialized but characterized as emotionally divergent, less attractive, and less virtuous than Julia, the second wife upon whom Haywood bestows a benevolent ending, in contrast to the original. While both Manley and Aubin place readers' sympathies with the first wife, Haywood characterizes the first wife, Climene, as a self-interested woman with an overt agency that defies virtuous femininity. The husband, Bellcourt, is a passive hero who does not physically engage with the second wife, Julia, until after the demise of his

[475] Ferguson, 4.
[476] Persons, "Translation and Empire in Haywood's La Belle Assemblée," 172.

first marriage. Unlike in prior versions, the second wife, Julia, personifies feminine virtue through her role as chaste victim. Haywood dramatizes Julia's victimhood through an added subplot of attempted sexual assault.

Haywood's tale begins in the wake of Oliver Cromwell's monarchal usurpation in the 1650s. As a result of the Interregnum, William Bellcourt is orphaned and loses his inheritance due to his father's Royalist sympathies. Bellcourt lands in Spain with his wealthy uncle, who arranges for a marriage with an unnamed woman. Bellcourt is, however, already ensnared with Climene; Climene's mother puppeteers their secret marriage, which Bellcourt acknowledges publicly once his uncle dies. Their union is ruptured through a subplot with Bellcourt's friend, Don Octavio. Don Octavio seeks his friend's help with assaulting a woman whom he has kidnapped after she refuses his advances. Bellcourt, passively accepting that which comes his way, supports his friend in this endeavour until he realizes that the beautiful woman his friend is preparing to assault is the woman his uncle intended him to marry. This woman, Julia, explains to Don Octavio how her feelings are devoted to Bellcourt. "I saw a form which in one moment taught me more of Love than ever I was able to learn from you," she tells Don Octavio.[477] In this formulation, Julia passively receives from Bellcourt's person sufficient erotic interest to arouse her own passions. She explains that "to retrieve my Freedom, I broke through all Shame, and own'd my secret Flame."[478] Julia's passions had led her to ask her father to arrange a marriage between her and Bellcourt. And yet, even in that formulation wherein Bellcourt's uncle comes to him with a marriage prospect, Julia's agency is presented as passive. Likewise, Bellcourt overhears Julia's explanation to her assailant; Julia does not directly reveal herself to Bellcourt, allowing her to preserve her social chastity. Bellcourt intervenes upon learning this information

[477] Eliza Haywood, *Love in Its Variety: Being a Collection of Select Novels* (London: W. Feales, 1727), 121.
[478] Haywood, 122.

and informs Julia of his sudden erotic interest. Julia refuses his interest because Bellcourt is married. "[Y]et did it shock her Virtue, to hear such passionate Declarations from a Man who had disposed his Hand and Vows to another Woman."[479] Julia requests that "he would talk no more on that Subject" of love.[480] She declares his interest "a crime which neither Heaven nor she could pardon," marking Bellcourt as explicitly criminal for the first time in the narrative.[481] Julia's passivity reinforces the passivity of Bellcourt and subdues his adulterous inclination.[482] Julia's influence—as well as Violenta's revenge and Panthea's inaction—demonstrates the operative power of white feminism's victimhood. Hamad writes, "The insidiousness of this strategic White Womanhood is that it masks power. It is power pretending to be powerless."[483] White feminism weaponizes the clandestine power of white femininity, using passivity as a guise for absconding responsibility.

Unusually for amatory fiction, the tension between Bellcourt and Julia does not drive the narrative after her rescue; rather, Climene's unraveling propels the plot and enables the union of Bellcourt and Julia. Climene learns that her husband "was fallen most passionately in love with *Julia*."[484] This knowledge incites her vengeance. Climene exposes herself as self-interested, vain, and antagonistic in her response to her husband's passions, which he has not acted on. "[S]he flew on *Bellcourt* the moment he enter'd the Room."[485] Akin to Violenta, Climene is likened to a mythic figure: "she grew more like a Fury than a Woman."[486] Bellcourt's repulsion at the sight ruptures our previous understanding of Climene. "She, […] who had married him more out of a

[479] Haywood, 130.
[480] Haywood, 130.
[481] Haywood, 130.
[482] Haywood, 130.
[483] Hamad, *White Tears Brown Scars*, 132.
[484] Haywood, *Love in Its Variety: Being a Collection of Select Novels*, 132.
[485] Haywood, 133.
[486] Haywood, 133.

Principle of Interest than Love, perceiving she no longer maintain'd her former Power over him, thought of nothing but revenging the Indignity he put upon her Beauty."[487] Climene reveals that her priorities and self-perception are outside of womanly virtue. In lamenting her loss of power over Bellcourt that she maintained through her beauty, Climene reveals that sexuality and control are the basis of her identity and agency. Climene's sense of self drives her to commence an affair with Bellcourt's friend, Don Octavio. Don Octavio "won the fair *Climene*, partly through Revenge on her Husband, and partly thro' Inclination to this new Adorer."[488] Climene becomes a sexual agent and acts against the feelings of Bellcourt. Violenta's revenge is a carefully staged imitation of the abuses Roderigo inflicted; Climene's revenge is an ongoing act that repeatedly stains her virtue. Climene's virtue suffers further when Bellcourt divorces her and Don Octavio abandons her. Only after her lover's abandonment does she feel the weight of her choices: "the Grief of [Don Octavio's scorn], together with the Shame which her Disgrace had brought upon her, made Life become a Burden."[489] Rather than face further judgement or vindicate her honor, Climene commits suicide with poison, as the sexually voracious Climene does. Climene's adulterous actions, rather than Julia's passion, allow Bellcourt to divorce her and renew his advances to Julia.

In bestowing a happy marriage upon Julia and Bellcourt and bringing Climene to suicide, Haywood portrays Julia as the preferrable example of womanhood. Climene's passions and interests spill into the realm of her agency and direct her actions. Julia, in contrast, allows events to happen to her and reveals her feelings only as those events necessitate. Climene's marriage to Bellcourt is described as a "lawless Flame" compared to Julia's "constant Flame."[490] Through

[487] Haywood, 133–34.
[488] Haywood, 134.
[489] Haywood, 139.
[490] Haywood, 139, 140.

Julia, Haywood defines the affect of virtue as passivity, through Julia's victimhood and her erotic restraint. Further, this mode of feminine virtue is preserved as an emblem of wealth and class status. Unlike in Manley's and Aubin's stories, Haywood's version culminates in rewarding the second wife who is born into a wealthy and titled family. In Haywood, feminine virtue is preserved as a tool for the wealthy and aristocratic. Perhaps, in Haywood's world, it would be possible for Climene to obtain this feminine virtue, as Manley's Violenta does. But Climene defines her agency in her erotic desire such that she operates like the sexually violent D'Octavio as well as Bellcourt. Climene exceeds the boundaries of femininity. With the villainization of Climene against the valorization of Julia, Haywood, like Manley and Aubin, declares passivity as virtue's affective orientation. Similarly, virtue in each Violenta novella is a means of survival, defined through the understanding that men hold social power. Women who make their desires known and their actions blatant are excessive to society. Women who frame their feelings and actions as reactions are deemed virtuous and rewarded with social security because the deportment of such women confirm the superiority of men. Men are the actors of society, and only men are citizens.

In the 1720s, when amatory fiction was at its peak and the Violenta novellas entered readers' hands, the defining attributes of citizenry were changing. In the centuries to come, racial capitalism informed the terms of citizenry. As racialization and economic power explode, the romanticization of women's passivity is more explicitly the romanticization of whiteness. In the meantime, the sentimental romance strengthens the eroticization of passivity through the novel's developing emphasis on interiority.

Clarissa's slide through life

A literary and cultural phenomenon, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* minutely explodes the interstices of white femininity through a sentimental eroticism rather than amatory fiction's material eroticism. Detailing the sexual and emotional violence's Clarissa undergoes at the hands of the villainous Richard Lovelace as well as her family, Richardson's lengthy epistolary form delivers a sense of immediacy and intimacy hitertho unexperienced in literature. Embedded in Clarissa's interiority and not her physical actions, emotions become a cognitive process rather than a physical experience. This epistemological shift imbues an individual with greater potential for agency. As naturally feeling creatures, we all possess the tools needed for the upstanding virtue and intellect of someone like Clarissa: feelings.

Stitched into the radical potential of the sentimental are amatory fictions' strands of racialization, gendering, and capitalism. The sentimental eroticism of Clarissa, as compared to the material eroticism of Fantomina or Cleomira, confirms how white femininity is malleable, its contemporary contours straining to obscure the ideological injustices of racial capitalism. Despite the recurring sexual violence that leads to Clarissa's death rather than marriage, *Clarissa* is categorizable as a romance because the novel is a seduction narrative in conversation with the romance form, with marriage held over the head of readers as a potential narrative salve. *Clarissa* is the sentimental take on *The Accomplish'd Rake*, with more rape and less jaunty mockery of the villainous rapist. Clarissa is likewise a virtuously vengeful heroine, descended from Violenta. Yet, again, the similarities are hidden by the vast differences. For, the sentimental form of *Clarissa* consolidates amatory fiction's melodrama; the British sentimental novel brings romance home, so to speak, by grounding it within Britain's contemporary moment and in our heroine's interiority. The result is a "realism" that explodes the ethical considerations of feeling

and action in amatory fiction. The tantalizing erotic sympathy of amatory fiction brought the reader towards ethical consideration, but sentimentalism operates in reverse: overwrought emotions demand ethical alignment that in turn allows erotic pleasure, and this eroticism is not necessarily sexual or romantic but the eroticism of ethical approbation. The sentimental romance extracts much more sympathy from the reader, thus affectively drawing the reader closer to the commodified citizenry of the romance form. In *Clarissa*, the sympathy contract comes to the fore in the relationship between reader and text. The novel's sentimental eroticism demands a sympathetic readerly identification to categorize the reader as properly sociable; Richardson's narrative form and appropriation of amatory tropes reformulate the orientation of this identification towards an accessible white femininity.

This process takes root in Richardson's epistolary style, which achieves a level of interiority absent in amatory writing and generates varying levels of intimacy—and thus truth—between characters. Richardson's epistolary style generates immediacy and records minutiae that increase the social stakes of the erotic in comparison to amatory fiction's worldbuilding of mythic sensuality. Following Clarissa's rape and continued refusal of Lovelace, a letter from Clarissa's mother to Mrs. Norton is included. This letter confirms the family's strict reading of virtue. Mrs. Harlowe writes, "nothing will be heard in her favour."[491] This strictness leaves little space for compassion. Mrs. Harlowe insists, "she is my Child Still!" in a manner that indicates a benevolent sympathy that acknowledges Clarissa's hardships.[492] And yet, Mrs. Harlowe turns again to skepticism: "And is she *really* ill? […] But she *ought* to sorrow.—She has given a double measure of it."[493] Mrs. Harlowe reads Clarissa's ongoing victimization at the hand of

[491] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. John J. Richetti and Toni Bowers, Abridged ed, Broadview Editions (Peterborough, Ont. ; Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2011), 614.
[492] Richardson, 615.
[493] Richardson, 615.

Lovelace as justification for refusing her family's chosen suitor. Such logic then positions the brutal dynamic between Clarissa and Lovelace within the larger network of the familial. Mrs. Harlowe extends this network in writing, "the general Cry against us abroad, where-ever we are spoken of; and the *visible*, and not seldom *audible* disrespectfulness, which High and Low treat us with to our faces."[494] Mrs. Harlowe informs the reader of her personal experiences in society. Given from her perspective, this reporting is necessarily tinged with Mrs. Harlowe's feelings. This is affectively unlike an amatory fiction, where a parent speaks their disappointment bluntly, whether through direct speech, within an inset narrative, or through a narrator. Such language collapses the family and the social, flattening characters by removing the individual exigencies of familial dynamics and thus the full complexities of feelings. Amatory fiction reads as comparatively material next to Richardson, turning incorporeal social mores into concrete narrative settings. In contrast, Mrs. Harlowe's letter is keenly sentimental—her letter does not primarily function to provide narrative information (readers are well aware of the Harlowe's despicable behavior), but to build out character feeling. Part of this feeling is social reputation—readers learn here of how the Harlowes are reacting to the criticism around them. This information of their sentiments is critical, because it informs the reader that the absolute values of the Harlowes are in tension with their society. With this tension, Richardson engenders realism because of how, over the course of the narrative, social understanding of Clarissa shifts from aligning with the family's stringent control over Clarissa to rebuking their treatment of her. The narrative presents a particular, rather than generalized experience. This is because of the novel's lugubrious, rather than material, affect.

[494] Richardson, 615.

This affective style is even on display in *Clarissa*'s portrayal of the legal system; the lengthy novel shatters a uniform reading of the law, extending the political challenges that amatory fiction presents. In Delarivier Manley's "The Wife's Resentment," the law mainly functions as a prop to set a sympathetic scene and critique gender politics. This is in part because of how amatory fiction sees the law as unmovable. Contesting the law—and the monarch behind the law—occur in its shadows. Individual actors challenge the political system well below the seat of power in affective displays. In *Clarissa*, the legal system is a recurring cultural institution that can be manipulated for personal interests. Through his legal will, Clarissa's grandfather upends tradition to favor Clarissa—a recognition of her exceptionalism that alienates her into a narrative from which she further proves her heroine status. Clarissa grandfather bequests his wealth and land to her, rather than his sons or Clarissa's older brother. Such independent economic agency on the grandfather's part—as well as Clarissa's rejection of her family's choices for her—connects to contemporary social and political contract theory from John Locke.[495] Clarissa's parents and siblings wish to erase the grandfather's progressive self-made history through another legal institution that will allow them to acquire more social capital: marriage. Clarissa's marriage with the wealthy landowner Roger Solmes is their recourse for achieving this goal. When this legal method fails the Harlowes, they later dangle the law as a

[495] Scholars reading Locke in Clarissa include Toni Bowers, John Richetti, and Beth Cortese. Locke explores social contract theory and related concepts of reason, property, and religion in "A Letter Concerning Toleration" (1689), *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), and *An Essay Considering Human Understanding* (1693). My reading of Locke is informed by Melissa Butler and Kristie McClure. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 1995); Locke; John Locke and David Wootton, *Political Writings*, Reprinted, Originally publ. by Penguin Books, 1993 (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 2003); Melissa A. Butler, "Early Liberal Roots of Feminism: John Locke and the Attack on Patriarchy," in *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory*, ed. Carole Pateman and Mary Lyndon Shanley (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 74–94; Kirstie M. McClure, "Difference, Diversity, and the Limits of Toleration," *Political Theory* 18, no. 3 (August 1990): 361–91, https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591790018003002; John J. Richetti and Toni Bowers, "Introduction," in *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*, Abridged ed, Broadview Editions (Peterborough, Ont. ; Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2011), 16; Beth Cortese, "Possessed by Property: Inheritance in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747–1748)," *Orbis Litterarum* 77, no. 3 (June 2022): 175–86, https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12338.

means for Clarissa to gain back their good graces. Arabella Harlowe, in a letter following her mother's to Mrs. Norton, explains to her sister that the law is her only recourse for rejoining her family.

> [Y]ou may yet justify your character to us, and to the world, in every-thing but your scandalous Elopement; and the Law may reach the villain: And, could we but bring him to the gallows, what a meritorious revenge would that be to our whole injured family, and to the innocents he has deluded, as well as the saving from ruin many others![496]

Arabella not only underscores the family's concern with their social reputation but also places kinship within the legal realm. Clarissa's familial ties subject to her pursuit of the law and her willingness to publicize her personal traumas. The Harlowes attempt to broaden the authority of their family system through the law, but without success. *Clarissa* refuses the traditional monarchical rule in favor of John Locke's concepts of self-preservation and individual reason. *Clarissa* also endorses Locke's understanding of reason and private property, which are foundational to racial capitalism. In this same vein, Clarissa relentlessly asserts her agency in passive terms. Clarissa self-authors herself new terms of life, which bring her to write her own death and afterlife—literally inscribing her casket and authoring a will, in which she re-bequeaths her grandfather's inheritance to her father. This bequeathal appeases both new and old systems. Clarissa wants to, as her grandfather hoped, ensure the Harlowe lands and wealth are preserved in their entirety—a protection of private property. Clarissa also reverts the family's economic and social power back to a patriarch. Denying her own self-preservation in favor of her existing ethical standards of feminine virtue, Clarissa scripts herself in passive terms. One can

[496] Richardson, *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*, 638.

read Clarissa's agency in myriad ways, just as the novel portrays the law as subject to individual interpretation. The sentimental fanfare around Richardsonian sentimentality illustrate that one popular reading fuses impeccable morality, genteel femininity, and compliant passivity—which only whiteness makes obtainable.

Clarissa and its predecessor *Pamela* are famously influential in the history of reading for the communal and personal experiences they crafted; with their commodity culture and affective identification, Richardson's novels generate an empirical litmus test for socio-cultural belonging and build out the intimate public of amatory fiction into the broader intimate public of the romance form. Writing on *Pamela* in her study on reading culture, Abigail Williams describes the novel's commodification. "Like a new style of gown, the novel was a fashionable object," Williams writes.[497] "Readers wanted to be seen with their new book."[498] Readers could also flaunt their compassion for Pamela with merchandise ranging from fans to prints.[499] Such commodities were materializations of the affective experiences readers had to Richardson's novels. This performative access was, of course, limited to those who could not only afford these items but also had the opportunities to display them. In these material displays, consumers performed sympathetic intimacy. This non-diegetic consumption of Pamela signaled an alignment with the text's sentimental eroticism, indicating that the text impressed so much upon the reader that they quite literally carried the text—and all of the heroine's virtues—with them.

As sentimental novels, *Pamela* and *Clarissa* construct readerly identification, which the merchandise symbolized, through a conflation of depressive emotions, social virtuosity, entertainment and eroticism. Richardson receives a plethora of praise in Clara Reeve's *The*

[497] Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home*, 2018, 225, https://www.degruyter.com/doi/book/10.12987/9780300228106.
[498] Williams, 225.
[499] Williams, 226.

Progress of Romance (1785), a genealogy of romance fictions. Reeve fashions this genealogy as a conversation between Hortensius, Sophronia, and Euphrasia and orients the narrative through the inquires of Hortensius, the sole man in the group. Euphrasia, more so than Sophronia, serves as the educator and mouthpiece for Reeve. Turning over the phenomenon of Richardson's novels, Euphrasia declares their superior moral value over other romances. "Let the young girls bear the faults of the letters they write, let them copy *Richardson*, as often as they please, and it will be owing to the defects of their understandings, or judgments, if they do not improve by him."[500] Richardson's epistolary novels function as entertaining conduct books because of how the heroines model virtue through their chastity. The heroines also serve as cultural inspectors, signaling a reader's own virtues through their sympathetic identification. Euphrasia declares,

> There needs no other proof of a bad and corrupted heart, than it's being insensible to the distresses, and incapable to the rewards of virtue.—I should want no other criterion of a *good* or *bad* heart, than the manner in which a young person was affected, by reading *Pamela*.[501]

The ideal response is epitomized in Lady Bradshaigh's descriptions of reading *Clarissa*, which she shared in letters to Richardson—the epistolary nature of their discourse underscores the accessibility of the Richardsonian heroine. Bradshaigh notes how she "once intended to point out, and take notice, as I went along, of what I thought particular beauties, but they came so thick upon me, that I found it would be an endless piece of work."[502] She essentially describes rewriting the novel in a way that highlights her narrative communion. Such a description—

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[500] Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance through Times, Countries, and Manner* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1970), 138.
[501] Reeve, 135.
[502] Mrs. Belfour Lady Bradshaigh, "Lady Bradshaigh to Richardson," in *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. John J. Richetti and Toni Bowers, Abridged ed, Broadview Editions (Peterborough, Ont. ; Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2011), 728.

occurring within a written expression—demonstrates how novel reading is novel making. Bradshaigh writes, "I expected to suffer, but not to that degree I have suffered."[503] She has "shed a pint of tears" over Richardson's "noble work."[504] Bradshaigh goes as far as to describe an affective and emotional possession, which illuminates the intensity of the Richardsonian intimate public. "My spirits are strangely seized, my sleep is disturbed; waking in the night, I burst into a passion of crying."[505] This experience extends to non-women, too. Lady Bradshaigh describes how her husband "was at that time labouring through the sixth volume with a heart capable of impressions equal to my own."[506] In expressing their experiences in her letter, Bradshaigh does what she cannot do due to proximity: showcase her emotional and consequently physical response to Richardson. "Had you seen me, I surely should have moved your pity," she writes.[507] She seeks to move Richardson, who moved her first. The novel creates a circular affective economy, a closed loop between those sharing the same affective abilities. Lady Bradshaigh's and Reeve's descriptions evince how Richardson's works created not simply a one-to-one relationship between reader and text but an affective network—an intimate public. Richardson created, within and outside of his writing, affective networks for the sake of moral improvement. Akin to the Whig concept of sociability, Richardson valued a social community founded on the literary so long as it conspired with his moral politics. Laura Doyle writes, "Most important for the form of Richardson's novel, the rightly noble Clarissa embodies the Atlantic, Anglo-Protestant ideal in her will to transparency: the Cromwellian Puritan dream of an interior fully manifest and the Whig dream of an unmediated relation to the contract."[508] Richardson sought

[503] Lady Bradshaigh, 729.
[504] Lady Bradshaigh, 728.
[505] Lady Bradshaigh, 729.
[506] Lady Bradshaigh, 729.
[507] Lady Bradshaigh, 729.
[508] Laura Doyle, *Freedom's Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640–1940* (Duke University Press, 2007), 139, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388739.

such a network, as Laura Doyle explains, because Richardson understood his novel as encouraging moral introspection. "He seduces his readers with that dream above all by enabling us to participate in a common polity organized around it — as suggested by his own prolific correspondence with his readers and his promotion of the novel as a reproducible commodity."[509] The language of reproducible, which evokes mimesis, implies the closed nature of the romance novel's intimate public because in order to reproduce the virtuosity of the novel one must have the requisite affective potential. One must properly swoon and become undone as Lady Bradshaigh did; in other words, one must obey the sympathy contract.

Lady Bradshaigh recounts an oratory experience that demonstrates how the affective networking of *Clarissa* upholds the paradoxical constraints of the sympathy contract.

> A lady was reading to two or three others the seventh volume of *Clarissa*, whilst her maid curled her hair, and the poor girl let fall such a shower of tears upon her lady's head, that she was forced to send her out of the room to compose herself, asking her what she cried for; she said, to see such goodness and innocence in distress; and a lady followed her out of that room and gave her a crown for that answer.[510]

Again, the communal nature of reading and the affective intensity of Richardson's novels is evident here. This anecdote mirrors the novels themselves in that lady's maid is the most affected. As the most moved, she displays the most noble sensibility despite her class. Like Pamela, or Violenta, the maid's feelings traverse class hierarchies and enables a closer attachment to the gentry class. And yet, this status is revoked through the same mechanism of sympathy. As a monetary act of approbation, the coin confirms the maid's sympathetic ability

[509] Doyle, 139.
[510] Quoted in Williams, *The Social Life of Books*, 214.

within the economic and status hierarchies that her sympathy theoretically allows her to traverse. The sympathy contract reconfirms extant boundaries and restrains those who seek to bypass them. This is because, as explored in the last chapter, of the subjectivity involved in sympathy and how sympathy depends upon a hierarchical logic. The sympathy contract's measurement of humanity originates with the sentimental European man, and all his correlated hierarchies. The sympathy contract does not dissolve the boundaries constructing this ideal, but rather attempts to distill the phenomenological experience of this ideal into an imitable model. Though the model is empty, the signifiers of the complete ideal remain. As Yao writes, "white sentimentalism suppresses and renders illegible the emergence of alternative structures of feeling that would threaten its posturing as universal."[511]

As the most sentimental Richardsonian character through whom readers can advertise their sympathetic sensibility, Clarissa is emblematic of white femininity and its correlated deployment of passivity. In relation to the earlier white heroines of amatory fiction, Clarissa aligns more with the emerging fiction of the modern subject. This subject is characterized by historically atypical economic independence, an elevated degree of rational interiority, and involvement in socio-cultural discourse. Clarissa is not an entrepreneur of emergent capitalism, but rather an intermediary of aristocratic and capitalist systems through her inheritance debacle. The origin of her grandfather's wealth is unclear, but the land is seemingly domestic rather than a colonial estate or an estate dependent on colonial wealth. Scholars such as Laura Doyle suspect his wealth was not newly acquired, like the wealth of Clarissa's brother and father. As Laura Doyle writes, "Richardson stages the Anglo woman's entry into modernity's free, republican order as a trauma shaped by a deadly contest over property with her ambitious brother, himself

[511] Yao, *Disaffected*, 32.

empowered by the family's new colonial wealth."[512] Thus, Clarissa's inheritance reads as a nostalgic inheritance while simultaneously individuating her from her family in a novel way. The family's greed for Clarissa's inheritance and her marriage to Solmes comes from their desire for more social capital; further land and wealth under brother James's name could deliver him a title. The Harlowes illustrate how colonial capitalism is fused with the historical British class system. The family's reading of Clarissa depends on her inheritance, an event that happens to Clarissa. In her first letter, Clarissa writes about how her inheritance "has estranged from me my brother's and sister's affections."[513] Her financial situation alienates her from others, re-casting her as a novel heroine of independence, like Robinson Crusoe or Moll Flanders, rather than a stock figure of genre.

This original facet of Clarissa is coupled with the epistolary form that Richardson draws out to excruciating detail. Through its narrative form, the novel models a rational yet feeling interiority through Clarissa, and this interiority is in constant contact with various advisors. Rachel Carnell writes.

> By thus publicizing the most intimate details of her private oppression, Clarissa expands the idea of the public sphere from periodical and coffee-house debates among propertied men to include gossip among neighbours and boarding-house keepers as well as epistolary exchanges between aristocratic women.[514]

As amatory fiction has shown, seemingly trivial feminine concerns can speak to political issues of society and state. In media from *Clarissa* to the Austen adaptation *Clueless* (1995) such possibilities exist—alongside the ideological forces these media contest. The liminality of the

[512] Doyle, *Freedom's Empire*, 118.
[513] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, n.d., 35.
[514] Rachel K. Carnell, "Clarissa's Treasonable Correspondence: Gender, Epistolary Politics, and the Public Sphere," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 10, no. 3 (1998): 284, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.1998.0030.

romance form makes resting within capitalist ideology—and its attendant communal harms—all too easy. In this same vein, Carnell writes that "the novel's own potential for effecting social transformation founders on its reception (to which Richardson himself certainly contributed) as merely a conduct manual about marriage."[515] This subversive complicity—that springs up through the romance form's development in the eighteenth century—is critical to developing the ideal of white femininity. This occlusion establishes the hypocrisy that becomes fundamental to white feminism, wherein race and gender intersect such that white women subscribe to white femininity with the aim of securing a secondary socio-cultural position to white men but above people of color. The consciousness-raising nature of a novel like *Clarissa*, when mediated through mass popularity, invites readings that endorse rather than challenge hegemonic ideologies.

Regardless, Clarissa's agential affect builds upon the standards of passivity and feminine virtue seen in amatory fiction. Like an amatory heroine, her narrative action pivots on reactivity and inaction, especially following the inciting incident of refusing her family's chosen suitor. The Harlowe family's animosity towards Clarissa develops intensely following Clarissa's refusal to marry Roger Solmes. The family isolates Clarissa for this refusal, a tense rejection carrying the affective negativity of other surrounding events. The family reads this refusal as an active interest in Lovelace. Hypocritically, Arabella Harlowe has already refused a marriage proposal from Lovelace. This refusal does not accrue family tension, though Clarissa's does.[516] Anna, in the opening letter of the novel, acknowledges the complicated nature of events, wherein various allegiances are intersecting; nonetheless, Anna establishes for the reader Clarissa's unwavering

[515] Carnell, 286.
[516] Their negative reaction is somewhat understandable given that social norms dictate Arabella, as the older sister, would marry first.

passivity. Anna writes, "So steady, so uniform in your conduct: so desirous, as you always said, of sliding through life to the end of it unnoted."[517] Clarissa is an entity around which events happen. "Sliding" through the narrative, Clarissa does not emit action; she only swerves to avoid the actions of others. "[R]esponsive rather than responsible" is how Scott Gordon describes Clarissa.[518] Gordon writes about the novel through his notion of the passivity trope.

The passivity trope, in Gordon's elaboration, interweaves contemporary theories of individualism and shifts in aristocratic culture. Gordon specifically considers passivity in the rhetoric of disinterestedness, which was an aristocratic paradigm of virtue interlaced with religious and literary influences. Like the language of the passions, disinterestedness is a misnomer to our modern understanding. Disinterestedness refers to a lack of self-interest that enables an individual to be instrumental to others. Disinterestedness served its contemporary setting by constellating moral virtue within aristocratic rhetoric. Specifically, disinterestedness served a monarchical structure; by divine right, the king was the state. Ideally, then, all citizens prioritized the interest of the king, because they were also the interests of their state. For those in more direct service to the king—like the nobility—disavowing personal concerns was especially important. The theoretical implantation of this subservience was iterated in chivalric romance.[519]

Although disinterestedness seemingly dissipates in the wake of Hobbesian self-interest and the rise of individualism, the passivity trope and amatory fiction preserve the aristocratic virtue within the aesthetic of excess. Hobbes and others who championed self-interest, like John Locke and Bernard Mandeville, "came to leave in their wake no space for even the possibility of

[517] Richardson, *Clarissa*, 33.
[518] Scott Paul Gordon, *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640-1770* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 19.
[519] The anonymously written *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) exemplifies this disinterest in a romance narrative closer in lineage to the romance form. The eponymous heroine falls in love with the Duke de Nemours but never pursues their mutual passion; even after her husband's death, the Princess enters a convent rather than marry the Duke because her husband requested she not do so. The author is likely Madame de Lafayette.

behavior done for another."[520] Hobbes, according to Gordon, fictionalizes the possibility of disinterestedness. He "naturalizes self-interest by construing discourses that preserve disinterested behavior as unreal or 'merely' fictional."[521] Given that man is innately self-interested, pursuing the desires of another of themselves poses a great difficulty. This obsequiousness is personally and socially harmful, because man will better exert his physical and mental capacities for himself. In the paradigm of self-interest, virtuous action requires self-interest. And, as a natural phenomenon, self-interest is an accessible pathway to virtue. Yet, as Gordon states, the rhetoric of self-interest continues to exalt disinterestedness and passivity. In naturalizing self-interest, Hobbes makes disinterestedness unattainable; given disinterestedness's pre-existing exclusivity, Hobbes renders disinterest even more exclusive. In contrast to the innateness of self-interest, disinterestedness becomes a chosen privilege available to only a select few. The rhetoric of self-interest emerges as a central conceit of personhood in the eighteenth century, through philosophers such as Adam Smith and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A defining necessity of society, self-interest facilitates capitalist theory in the eighteenth century and through to our modern moment. Only those who have surfeited on self-interest or are willing to experience the suffering of servility can afford disinterest. Extraneous to the many and a byproduct of the natural, disinterestedness becomes social excess.

Likewise, disinterest seemingly becomes a historical relic for romance fiction after the demise of chivalric romances. Such narratives, which featured titled lovers and heroic knights rather than penniless heroines, "exhort[] readers to behave selflessly and consider such behavior extraordinary, possibly only for the heroic view."[522] Disinterest was for the few, whereas the

[520] Gordon, *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640-1770*, 1.
[521] Gordon, 17.
[522] Gordon, 6.

eighteenth-century romance form offered virtue to the many—but, amatory fiction evolves from the chivalric and such vestiges continue on through Austen. Indeed, the vaunted idealization of femininity in the eighteenth-century form is like the immanent heroines and heroic knights of chivalric romances. Thus, the passivity trope intersects with the literary application of passivity and passive obedience already discussed in amatory fiction. Eighteenth-century romances subsume the extraneous rhetoric of disinterest into their rhetoric of passivity, especially through the sentimental and domestic romances' turn to interiority. Clarissa, in particular, adheres to the mold of the chivalric romance in her exceptionalist virtue, though in lieu of a heroic quest Clarissa's journey is one of interiority and preservation. Likewise, Clarissa is an updated amatory fiction character as the desiring yet ultimately victimized heroine in a seduction narrative. The mediation of excess, as explored, demarcates this romantic genealogy that Clarissa continues with the excess of the sentimental erotic. That which distinguishes Clarissa—her ability to feel and engender feeling—also enables her disinterest.

I only turn now to disinterest because of how the term speaks to economic changes and class dynamics that accelerate in the mid-century, and of how Richardson's novels—mainly *Pamela*—have appeared in cultural understandings of these contemporary class dynamics. That Pamela ascended class status from serving woman to squire's wife serves the argument that the Richardsonian character exemplified the development of the middle class. In this light, Richardson's characters functioned as subversive forces in the traditional class hierarchies because anyone could access traditional virtue through affect. This is culturally significant, because despite the financial development of a new middle class through mercantilism and imperialism, newly wealthy individuals were not admitted wholesale into the gentry class. Money, as they say, cannot buy class. But, money with the right attitude can. The affective

disinterest of the heroine affords access to the historic class concept of virtue. This affect becomes a means to bypassing the gatekept upper echelons of society, and then a means for re-establishing that gate by fusing feminine passivity with colonial wealth. The heroine's morality becomes increasingly affectively linked to imperialism and what she stands to inherit from developing capitalism. Considering what she terms the Heroine of Disinterest in eighteenth-century romance novels, Virginia Cope reads the continuation of disinterest in literary heroines, arguing that disinterestedness became feminized and domesticated over the century.[523] For Cope, disinterest functions akin to my reading of virtue: a rhetoric that promises class mobility while isolating individuals through gender. In reference to characters like Clarissa and Arabella of *The Female Quixote*, Cope writes that the eighteenth century "naturalized" the feminization of disinterest in response to capitalism's abstraction of wealth.[524] Consequently, "the ability to comprehend the greater good, rising above personal and particularly economic concerns, is born out of suffering and economic uncertainty—the province of women rather than of aristocratic men."[525] Despite being heiresses, these heroines face precarious economic situations because of their gendered roles—Clarissa is one such example, whose victimhood within her family and through Lovelace keep her from her inheritance. Cope argues that disinterest pushed women into modernity and domesticity through a dual emphasis on interiority; as modern individuals, women's identity moved deeper into reflection *and* into the domestic space. In this double move, Cope sees a brief moment of recuperation as "[c]reative recollections are imagined as a form of self-created property, providing a powerful rubric for construing value internally, outside the

[523] Virginia H Cope, *Property, Education, and Identity in Late Eighteenth-Century Fiction Heroine of Disinterest* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), http://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780230239548.
[524] Cope, 4.
[525] Cope, 5.

gold standard of land, title, and inheritance."[526] The mind's ability can offer freedom even when sequestered inside, much like how Clarissa finds freedom in the pen while held captive. In this intersection, Cope describes an "affective economy," the central axis of intimate publics. Cope writes, "Heroines of Disinterest operate within a transitional model of family relations, what I call the affective economy, in which material, educational, and emotional goods are exchanged between parents and children."[527] With such an economic connection, a heroine's worth becomes tied to "her attitude toward that property" she might inherit, rather than the property itself.[528] **Feeling, then, supplants monetary wealth for the heroine in terms of her marital value. This language of affective economy alongside the creative output that Cope notes parallels the contemporary and scholarly emphasis on the imagination in the earlier part of the century and as explored in amatory fiction. In the wake of amatory fiction and the rise of the sentimental alongside growing imperialism, affective self-imagining becomes increasingly important to the construction of gendered citizenship. The Richardsonian heroine makes this case for narrativizing the self. If she can construct a narrative around herself that is sufficiently charged with affect, it does not matter if a woman is disadvantaged through the status of her class or body. This seemingly contrasts with earlier fictions from Haywood and Aubin, where materiality of the body held equal weight with the body's affective charge. Clarissa is disinterested to the point of foregoing the preservation of her body—indeed, her disinterest perpetuates her victimhood and reestablishes her bodily virtue within the affective rhetoric of sentimentality.** In the novel's first exchange of letters, Anna Howe describes her friend's upstanding morality, writing that

[526] Cope, 15.
[527] Cope, 5.
[528] Cope, 5.

Clarissa would prefer to "slid[e] through life to the end of it unnoted" and telling her that "every body pities you."[529] Clarissa is like a snail—steadfast and lugubrious but admirably pitiable and a necessary part of nature.

Clarissa coalesces virtue with victimhood—her goodness attracts her family's venom and Lovelace's dehumanizing treatment. "You see what you draw upon yourself by excelling all your Sex," Anna tells her friend in the novel's opening letter.[530] With such a statement, Clarissa can only ever react, for everything happens *to* her. Clarissa is innately a reactive victim. The pinnacle of Clarissa's virtues is her ability to reflect, a virtue displayed rhetorically throughout by way of Clarissa's impassioned writing. Clarissa's early language regarding Solmes evinces her emotional sensitivity. She writes Anna that Solmes lacks "Generosity, Frankness of Heart, Benevolence, Manner, and every qualification that distinguishes a worthy man."[531] She goes on to say, "How shall such a Husband as This be borne, were he, for reasons of *convenience* and *interest*, even to be our CHOICE?"[532] Clarissa's continued rejection of Solmes demonstrates the sentimental ethos, wherein a character's individual moral sensibilities hold greater standing than socio-economic concerns as dictated through the family. How a person treats another is of more interest to Clarissa than how a person stands socially. The excessive attention, at the expense of her own welfare, that Clarissa devotes to the sentimental ethos further displays her sensibility in the sentimental paradigm. Embedded within a seduction narrative with increasingly grave affective (for Clarissa, her community, and readers) and material (for Clarissa's welfare) stakes, the eroticism of the novel is undeniably sentimental. At risk is not merely Clarissa's marital status but also a social recognition of individual sentimental morality.

[529] Richardson, *Clarissa*, 33.
[530] Richardson, 34.
[531] Richardson, 153.
[532] Richardson, 153.

With sentimental eroticism undergirding Richardson's seduction narrative, Clarissa's disinterest emerges because Clarissa's commitment to sentimentalism trumps her interest in her welfare. Paradoxically, while Clarissa's excessive writing demonstrates the immanence of her virtue at the novel's onset, Clarissa's ultimate *lack* cements the transcendence of her sentimentalism. I take this language of transcendence from Jay Clayton's reading of *Clarissa* in relation to Romantic poetry and its attitudes toward the sublime. Clayton writes, "*Clarissa* anticipates the Romantic problem of how to accommodate a transcendent dimension of character within the formal conditions of narrative."[533] Clayton determines that ultimately *Clarissa* has an "inability to represent transcendence within the terms established by the rest of the narrative."[534] Clarissa's volubility infamously dissipates in the wake of Lovelace's physical violation of Clarissa, the culmination of repeated psychic trauma. In the course of Lovelace's assault, recounted during a series of Lovelace's letters to Belford, Clarissa's immediate interiority is lost—a metaphor for the violations she is undergoing. In lieu of a graphic depiction, the reader only has the briefest reference of rape from Lovelace: "And now, Belford, I can go no farther. The affair is over. Clarissa lives."[535] The form of Clarissa continues to live, while her interiority erodes. While previously Richardson oriented Clarissa's interiority through her language, now we first see her again through her rapist, which signals an ontological assault. Lovelace informs Belford and readers that "what she writes she tears, and throws the paper in fragments under the table."[536] These fragments are shared within Lovelace's letter. Clarissa's previous grasp on her

[533] Jay Clayton, *Romantic Vision and the Novel* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 27–28.
[534] Clayton, 28.
[535] Richardson, *Clarissa*, 473.
[536] Richardson, 479.

selfhood is lost. She scribbles but does not send to Anna phrases such as "whatever they have done to me, I cannot tell" and "I don't know what my name is!"[537]

Unmoored from her self, Clarissa's feelings and interests also lose their previous telos. Wendy Anne Lee describes Clarissa within the rhetoric of insensibility. By this, Lee does not assert Clarissa as harmfully unfeeling—as Lovelace acts—but as "incomprehensible."[538] Even when she is able to find her pen again, Clarissa continues to erase *and* expose herself. Lee writes, "As rape survivor and public writer, Clarissa flips the 'space of interiority' into a zone of shocking transparency."[539] With no interest left to protect or seek, Clarissa becomes all feeling toward no object. In refusing to turn to the law, Clarissa refuses the interests of her family. Yet, she constructs herself into an entity beyond person onto which others (readers, namely) can evacuate their feelings. In mandating the unusual decoration of her coffin, Clarissa marks her bodiless self and becomes symbolic. She marks the excess of disinterest—an already excessive rhetoric. Her lack of self-interest erodes her self. In this paradox, Clarissa is re-circumscribed within social expectations, thus avoiding the discrimination against feminine excess. Clarissa, so insensibly disinterested in her self, slides to her grave just as Anna initially described her as "sliding through life to the end of it unnoted."[540] Only, *Clarissa* and its readers haven taken much notice of Clarissa and vaunted her sensibility into a virtuous paradigm.

But this affective virtuosity is not as accessible as it may appear. As one whose story opens with an inheritance, Clarissa originates with a higher-class status than Pamela. She does not serve the same aspirational function as Pamela, who embodies aristocratic virtue and is

[537] Richardson, 480.
[538] Wendy Anne Lee, *Failures of Feeling: Insensibility and the Novel* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019), 89.
[539] Lee, 67.
[540] Richardson, *Clarissa*, 33.

consequently deserving of her ultimate gentry position. As seen with our non-fictional maid who weeps at Richardson, the feminine passivity of the sentimental erotic reinforces historical limits. As the maid shows, economic and class status retained significance. Meanwhile, nationality in terms of race accrued meaning in the face of colonialism. Considering both bodies and (picturesque) space, Judith Broome reads the sentimental body as a cultural construction seeking to confirm a nostalgic understanding of social hierarchy and moral virtue. Broome writes that the "sentimental body is nostalgic in its performance of empathy for the suffering or unfortunate relationship."[541] Broome specifically cites Clarissa's demise from person to text, thus aligning Clarissa's bodily form, her disinterest, and sentimentality with nostalgia. As the inheritor of her grandfather's estate facing off against her immediate family's newly acquired wealth, Clarissa partially embodies the landed past. And as she collapses from body to text, she imbues the textual with nostalgic potential. A key component of this nostalgia is, according to Laura Doyle, an apocryphal Anglo-Saxon past. This national myth operates in tandem with the rhetoric of liberty and contemporary politics to racialize whiteness. In the Stuart era, especially under Charles I, the Anglo-Saxon myth of race "develops in an emergently transatlantic England."[542] Doyle reads this racializing in early English fictions, including the works of Behn, Haywood, and Richardson. Her study connects narratives of colonial travel, like Behn's *Oroonoko*, with metaphorical passages, such as the fainting fit prevalent in romance narratives throughout the long eighteenth century. Doyle connects these passages with the rhetoric of liberty. This rhetoric is grounded in a "narrative in which the state, phoenix-like, falls into revolution, dissolves, reclaims its racial birthright to liberty, and is reborn into the freedom of a modern nation."[543]

[541] Judith Broome, *Fictive Domains: Body, Landscape, and Nostalgia, 1717-1770*, The Bucknell Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 35.
[542] Doyle, *Freedom's Empire*, 3.
[543] Doyle, 4.

Novels allegorize the birth of a free nation through two tropes, according to Doyle: swooning and seafaring. These allegorical tropes are largely gendered, with swooning (or fainting) becoming the more pertinent one for the romance form. Both seafaring and swooning function as narrative rites of passage that shape a man into a hero (Crusoe) or a woman into a heroine. They are spatial and temporal disruptions that displace the narrative into a new beginning. With this displacement, Doyle argues, the novel invokes the Anglo-Saxon myth and racializes the rhetoric of liberty. Doyle writes, "the Anglo-Saxon race's entry into a 'state' of liberty is from the beginning associated with an Atlantic crossing and trauma of exile that, moreover, resonates richly with Old Testament narratives of sea-crossing by another, affiliated, freedom-seeking race."[544] Doyle locates this state-crossing and the swoon in seduction narratives marred with the trauma of rape. Rape and the ensuing swoon the trauma causes become "the scene of interpellation," in Behn, Haywood, and Richardson.[545] Doyle argues that with *Clarissa*, Richardson "makes the liberty struggle explicitly native, infusing it with the rhetoric of English birthright."[546] Doyle makes this case not only through Clarissa's trauma, her noble virtue, continual relocations, and narrativization of interiority but also through Clarissa's brother. Doyle writes, "Richardson stages the Anglo woman's entry into modernity's free, republican order as a trauma shaped by a deadly contest over property with her ambitious brother, himself empowered by the family's new colonial wealth."[547] Akin to Broome's reading of nostalgia, Doyle reads the power struggles within *Clarissa* as "an investment in the pride of English culture more than any rebellion against its patriarchy."[548] For this reason, Doyle deems the novel a "national allegory

[544] Doyle, 4.
[545] Doyle, 118.
[546] Doyle, 118.
[547] Doyle, 118.
[548] Doyle, 137.

by way of a woman's violation story."[549] In tracking Clarissa's descent to the grave through her prolonged emotional suffer, Richardson exceeds the normal confines of the seduction narrative before ultimately reasserting convention through the passive sentimentality of his heroine. With this sentimental ethos, Richardson fortifies the discourse of white femininity that seduction narratives of the preceding decades had sown. Sentimental romances like *Clarissa* not only helped construct such an affective aesthetic, but—through readership and identification—became a commercial means of interpellating citizens into the sympathy contract.

Austen's comforting whiteness

Like *Clarissa*'s suffering, the violence of Austen upholds the politics of sympathy and passive feminine agency that undergird whiteness. The politics of sympathy are the enactment of the sympathy contract and describe how populations can fulfill the contract to gain social security through proximity to heteropatriarchy. The romance form, including in Austen's work, inculcates the idea that women achieve this proximity through a passive agency that operates in subservience to patriarchy *and* wields white femininity for greater hierarchal success. This mode of agency makes space for the patriarchal assumption that women are always already too much, by reorienting this too muchness as erotic conformity within an appropriate boundary, beyond which women are deemed fungible, excessive, and subaltern. In her novels, Austen uses her heroines to model white femininity while her narrative irony demarcates the abjectly excessive women and, in not sparing her heroines, comments on the impossibilities of such an ideal femininity. I continue here with my somewhat ungenerous reading of reading Austen. This reading exhumes the unseen aspects that accumulate as we read Austen for the fifth time—which

[549] Doyle, 137.

spills over into neoliberal portrayals of Austen that are the subject of the ensuing chapters. For now, I emphasize the pitfalls of Austen's irony that occur when readerly sympathy falls deeply for the idealization of Austen's heroines, resulting in a romanticization that leaves little room for critique. Character appearance and class are central to the solidification of whiteness in Austen and Anglo-American culture; Austen's narratives constellate these aspects around affective orientation. As in previously examined romances, Austen presents protagonists who seemingly distance themselves from reactive passivity and an intersubjectivity founded on victimhood. Yet, as somewhat previously explored, the complexities Austen are such that the targets of her satirical irony are naturalized. This refusal and capitulation is related to the liminality of the romance form that generates its erotic tension.

The mutual dependence between Austen's irony and white femininity is displayed in *Northanger Abbey* (1817). In her most overtly satirical novel, Austen plays with the popular gothic romances of Ann Radcliffe—satirizing an earlier romance genre is not an accidental trend of the romance form. *Northanger Abbey*'s main protagonist is Catherine Morland, a naïve young woman whose proclivity for gothic romances overtakes her imagination. While staying at the home of her new friend Eleanor Tilney, Catherine becomes convinced that Eleanor's father General Tilney murdered his wife; even though Catherine is concerned for her safety, she stays on at Northanger Abbey due to her respect for Eleanor and the visits of her dashing older brother, Henry, who becomes Catherine's heroic suitor. Catherine's willful irrationality reads as charming self-narrativizing compared to her other friend, Isabella Thorpe. Eleanor and Isabella are foils, and through their friendships with Catherine Austen explores intimacy and sincerity. Catherine's intimacy with the quiet and sensible Eleanor develops slowly. In contrast, Catherine and Isabella share an immediate and intense intimacy–or so Catherine believes. Isabella is, like Marianne, an

effusive and exuberant woman. Unlike Marianne, Isabella's affective resonance is a performance; Isabella is a keen social player, using feminine charm for her own gains. It is the performances of a dear friend and charming woman that draw in Catherine and her brother James Morland. Upon hearing Isabella Thorpe declare that James Morland "would be my only choice" even if she were an heiress, Catherine is suffused with a romantic pleasure. [550]

> This charming sentiment, recommended as much by the sense of novelty, gave Catherine a most pleasing remembrance of all the heroines of her acquaintance; and she thought her friend never looked more lovely than in uttering the grand idea.–"I am sure they will consent," was her frequent declaration; "I am sure they will be delighted with you."[551]

Catherine's conflation of Isabella with literary heroines is indicative of how both women perceive Isabella. Past references to novels have established Catherine's idea of a gothic romance heroine. Catherine writes Isabella's as admirably romantic. Unlike Catherine, Isabella's grandiosity enables her to outwardly perform the heroine role in its more melodramatic sense. "But I believe my feelings are stronger than any body's," Isabella earlier tells Catherine, upon Catherine refusing to rearrange her plans to suit Isabella's.[552] Isabella's solipsistic statement illustrates her main character syndrome. Indeed, Isabella's performs not merely the heroine role, but white femininity. And it is Isabella's performance of such a character that draws Catherine in. Catherine resonates with Isabella's performance of a "charming sentiment;" this performance constitutes a "pleasing" affect cast over Isabella's person, such that her friend "never looked more lovely." Catherine's consumption of romances is the basis of her friendship with Isabella as

[550] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Claire Grogan, 2. ed., [reprinted], Broadview Literary Texts (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2004), 132.
[551] Austen, 132.
[552] Austen, 113.

Isabella's personality is taken from those same pages that Catherine admires. Though the reader learns to read Catherine skeptically based on her romantic mode of living, this scene is relatively early in the novel, when the reader's skepticism is nascent. It is easy to conceive that a reader of *Northanger Abbey* is familiar enough with the romance form to feel the appeal of Isabella through Catherine's literary heroines reference. This moment is exemplary of Austen's mixing of skepticism, interiority, and intimacy. Here, intimacy springs from the relationships between Isabella and Catherine, Catherine and the reader, the reader and the narrator, the reader and their previous romance form interactions.

The satirical aspect of *Northanger Abbey* is a mimetic bathos that hinges Catherine's and perhaps the reader's awareness of their own (mis)reading habits, which subsequently ironize Catherine's heroine status. "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine," the novel announces at its start.[553] Of course, the great irony is that Catherine *is* our heroine. On one level, Austen, like Richardson with Pamela Andrews, ushers in new possibilities for those typically excluded from the great love stories. The novel seems to say, "Meek and mousy Catherine can live out her dreams, so why can't you too, reader?" This proclamation, however, assumes the novel's satire only reaches Catherine up to a certain point. What if we take the satire and the novel's jokes on Catherine even further toward her self-understanding? If we are to cringe at Isabella's performative utterances, surely we must also cringe at Catherine's performance as heroine? The cringworthiness that arises from Austen's dramatic irony in *Northanger Abbey* relates to social propriety and its regulatory processes of dis/comfort.

[553] Austen, 37.

Yoon Sun Lee argues that comfort in *Northanger Abbey*, and in Austen's texts generally, constitutes a phenomenology of whiteness. For Lee, comfort comes from the more literal scenes of comfort in Austen—Lee cites Lady Bertram's impressive ability to rest in *Mansfield Park* (1814)—and an affective comfort. Built into the Austenian domestic novel is "its representation of experience as having a background component, an imperceptible attunement to space, place, and situation."[554] Comfort is a support system that quietly guarantees safety. Lee ties together the experience of comfort and the experience of whiteness as an invisible and permeating force, which Lee takes from Sara Ahmed's "A Phenomenology of Whiteness." Lee writes, "That invisible background—the ability to fall back in confidence, to lean on something, to leap forward in hope, and most of all to stop noticing boundaries—is what I am calling a particular kind of phenomenological whiteness."[555] Comfort becomes signaled, too, in the narrative guarantee of Austen's stories. *Northanger Abbey* begins asserting that Catherine as heroine is narratively uncomfortable—she does not belong either as heroine or as occupant of Northanger Abbey. Yet ultimately, Catherine comfortably finds herself playing both roles. Emma Woodhouse, Elizabeth Bennet, and Fanny Price all experience discomfort that is eventually settled in amorous and domestic comfort. "Comfort is the undisputed focus of the aesthetic in Austen's novels," Lee writes. So often culminating in economically secure estates and psychic content, Austen's comfort is that of affective and aesthetic comfort. Comfort is the psychic and physical relief that follows from aligning with hegemonic ideologies. Comfort is what the romance form affords its heroines and readers

[554] Yoon Sun Lee, "Jane Austen, Whiteness, and the Phenomenology of Comfort," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 70 (2021): 111.

[555] Lee, 111.

Like Catherine, Fanny Price's narrative orients affectively around her discomfort at Mansfield Park, and yet the narrative arc ultimately grants her comfort in terms of her assimilation into the gentry class of her extended family. *Mansfield Park* begins with a rupture between sisters, due to the successful marriage of one and the unsuccessful marriage of another. Their social, physical, and emotional distance is bridged through Fanny, the eldest daughter of the sister whose marriage was a social and financial failure. Fanny joins the household of well-appointed Lady Betram and her husband Sir Thomas Betram, and their four children. The second eldest son, Edmund, is the most sensible and most kind to Fanny, who is a frightened and timid ward even as she comes of age. The other three Betram children expose their wanton moralities, in large part through their friendship with the Crawford siblings. Fanny rises about their unsuitable behavior and wins the heart of Edmund; newly married, the couple settles into a nearby parsonage thanks to Sir Betram. In Austen's domesticity, the excessive sensibility that was endearing in a sentimental character like Clarissa becomes irksome in a character like Fanny. But Fanny bears such likeness to many Austen characters, differing most greatly in her degree of self-reflection. When Sir Thomas first leaves to tend to his plantation in Antigua, Fanny mirrors her cousins' happiness at the liberties they feel given by the patriarch's absence. Fanny complicates the relief she feels with her self-deprecating logic that generates proper feeling through her lack of feeling: "a more tender nature suggested that her feelings were ungrateful, and she really grieved because she could not grieve. [...T]hat she should see him go without a tear!—it was a shameful insensibility."[556] Fanny's awareness of the monetary and physical comforts Sir Thomas bestows on her enforce this affective discomfort. Fanny shames herself for her lack of feeling, thus creating the feeling that she believes she ought to experience.

[556] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. June Sturrock, Broadview Literary Texts (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2001), 62.

In this emotional chastisement, Fanny seemingly displays to the reader a higher degree of reflective and emotional attunement. She is, in a way, modeling skepticism. Fanny's position as the chosen impoverished niece forces this state of obligation and its affective attachments onto Fanny.

Austen, through Fanny, renders the state of obligation into a necessary state of gratitude from which Fanny must develop other emotional attachments. Fanny's shame and discomfort is not the discomfort of resistance, wherein she finds ideological fault with her surroundings. Rather, Fanny's discomfort is the result of her personal failure to embody the ideal woman. Shy and mousy, Fanny initially fails to mitigate her parent's inferior socio-economic status. Her perceived failure, which generates her discomfort and feeds further into her "failure," harkens to many of our heroines. Behn's Isabella, Lennox's Arabella, Richardson's Clarissa: these women begin their tales positioned as the ideally virtuous women, but whose innate desire for erotic pleasure and personal liberty contradict the impossible social expectations of femininity. Romance provides the framework for exploring how social ideology punishes these women for the natural inclinations, with their narrative resolved through the women swallowing the social construct that natural deviance from normativity is their sin, and patriarchal submission through passivity is the means for absolution. The romance plot, coalescing natural erotic desire and heteropatriarchy so concisely in gendered terms, provides the mechanism for prolonging this process of conformity—the plot meanders back to where it began and confirms the heroine's initial virtue. In certain cases, such as Fanny's, the barrier to conformity appears trivial. Austen readers tend to rank Fanny low in their list of favorite heroines. Her problems aren't that bad! She won't stop crying!

Fanny settles her social discomfort by ultimately pushing her feelings back to where she feels they should ethically rest: in tears. Sir Betram suggests that Fanny invite her beloved brother to Mansfield Park. Betram remarks that he hopes Fanny's brother sees she has grown over the last six year, "though," he tells his niece "I fear, [William] must find his sister as sixteen in some respects too much like his sister at ten."[557] Fanny reads this as a statement of her inadequacy as a ward of Mansfield Park. "She cried bitterly over this reflection when her uncle was gone."[558] Endlessly indebted to Sir Thomas, Fanny runs through mental hoops to arrive at a place of deep gratitude, that she can then display to her uncle. This gratitude she strives for is not merely gratitude for her uncle but also for the means by which he provides for Fanny. Betram is a stridently patriarchal figure whose economic power is tethered to colonial enslavement. The patriarchal and imperial systems, while providing for Fanny, also negatively impact her affectively. Sir Thomas does exactly provide a loving childhood home, and her brother William's naval career is a burdensome blessing. In orchestrating gratitude towards her uncle, Fanny seeks proximity to the patriarchal and imperial network that initiates her discomfort. The narrative relays this process through revealing Fanny's tumultuous emotional cognition against her unassuming presence amongst others.

Thus, although Fanny is characterized constantly by her discomfort, in her journey towards submission, Fanny is repeatedly shown to be comfortable within Mansfield Park—Lee notes as much, citing Fanny's growing comfort under Edmund's tutelage and her comfort upon her brother's success at Mansfield Park. Fanny is ethically comfortable, as well, which becomes clear over the course of the novel as Fanny's estimation rises with both her uncle and her cousin. Speaking of how his children's inclinations differ from his, Sir Thomas tells his daughter's

[557] Austen, 62.
[558] Austen, 62.

fiancé, Mr. Rushworth, "'[*M*]*y* value for domestic tranquility, for a home which shuts out noisy pleasures, should much exceed theirs.'"[559] Fanny, rather than Mr. Rushworth, shares Sir Thomas's domestic interests, as a conversation between Edmund and Fanny shortly afterwards reveals. Responding to Edmund's comment that the brief amusing interlude provided by Sir Thomas's journey is over, Fanny explains,

> "I suppose I am graver than other people […]. The evenings do not appear long to me. I love to hear my uncle talk of the West Indies. I could listen to him for an hour together. It entertains *me* more than many other things have done—but then I am unlike other people I dare say."[560]

Although Fanny asserts her difference in this allegiance to Sir Thomas, she is asserting her similarity to not only her uncle but also her aunt. Fanny's interest is outdone by Lady Bertram's, who listens rapturously to her husband. Lady Bertram becomes "so sensibly animated as to put away her work, move Pug from her side, and give all her attention and all the rest of her sofa to her husband."[561] Lady Bertram feels no moral anxiety over Sir Thomas's return, as "her own time had been irreproachably spent" while he was abroad.[562] Her only fault is her lack of attention to her children, who have waywardly attempted a home performance of Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Lovers' Vows* (1798) at the urging of Tom Betram's friend and the flirtatious Crawford siblings. The comfort that Lady Bertram feels upon Sir Thomas's return is available to Fanny, given her shared orientation towards domestic quietude that the patriarch enforces.

While Fanny is often depicted in affective discomfort, her potential comfort is displayed in this scene and in her desired continuation of conversing with Sir Thomas regarding his work.

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[559] Austen, 203.
[560] Austen, 213.
[561] Austen, 196–97.
[562] Austen, 197.

The reader learns through a conversation between Fanny and Edmund that Fanny had asked her uncle about enslavement in the West Indies. Scholars such as Susan Fraiman have registered this moment and the text as Austen's indictment of contemporary enslavement.[563] The title *Mansfield Park* fuels this reading because, in a 1772 court case, Lord Mansfield determined that slavery was not sanctioned by law within England. He rejected the forcible removal of individuals from England as a term of their enslavement. This ruling freed the person involved in the court case. The implication was that slavery was outlawed on English soil.[564] Yet, I agree with Jenny Davidson when she writes,

> [s]everal critics have tried on this basis, perhaps naïvely, to enlist Austen for the cause of abolition […]. It is highly unlikely that Fanny's question to Sir Thomas—a question that Edmund Bertram hoped "would be followed up by others," after all, and that Fanny herself "longed" to pursue—could have been motivated primarily by hostility to his slave-owning.[565]

Fanny's pleasure at Sir Thomas's return and curiosity about his work sits strangely against the fact that Sir Thomas has been exploiting and dehumanizing people for monetary gain. Sir Thomas's physical decline hints at moral confusion. Fanny's interest, then, seems more like a probing, which is a hitherto unusual action for Fanny. Fanny has become increasingly comfortable with her place, in part thanks to her discomfort with the youthful rebellious attempt to stage *Lovers' Vows*. The failed theatrical performance, Michael Karounos writes, temporarily upends Mansfield Park's domestic order. "Furniture, people, morals, and ideas all undergo a

[563] Scholars see abolitionist sentiments in other Austen works. Catherine Ingrassia argues that the father of *Emma*'s insufferable Mrs. Elton is involved in the slave trade. Catherine Ingrassia, *Domestic Captivity and the British Subject, 1660-1750* (Charlottesville London: University of Virginia Press, 2022).
[564] Sarah Marsh, "Changes of Air: The Somerset Case and Mansfield Park's Imperial Plots," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 53, no. 2 (2020): 211–33, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecs.2020.0006.
[565] Jenny Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 157.

revolutionary upheaval that introduces disorder into the estate, into relationships, and into the psychological well-being of individuals."[566] Sir Thomas's return aborts this rebellion but does not snuff out its flame: caught up in the revolutionary sentiment, the Bertram daughters lose their virtue, ceding their hierarchal position to Fanny. Karounos reads the failed play as "a revolutionary assault on the twin principles of tradition and religion and on the persons representing those principles: Fanny and Edmund."[567] But Sir Thomas seems to be the ultimate symbol of tradition, as Edmund and Fanny ultimately partake in the rebellion, and the ensuing elopement of Henry Crawford and Maria Rushworth (née Bertram) erodes Sir Thomas's authority. Edmund and Fanny are the last couple standing. "Preservation of the state/estate depends upon conservation through gradual correction and not through innovation, such as when Edmund contrasts his views on improvement by stating that beauty should be 'acquired progressively,'" Karounos writes.[568] A slow meting out of progress within the paradigm of preservation is the path forward, evident in the novel's approbation of Fanny, a meek heroine whose affective discomfort slowly progresses into a social and affective comfort. Fanny is an empty space, within which the ideologies of yesteryear make just enough room for progressive values (of class mobility and abolition) for change to seem possible. And yet, doesn't Fanny return her family to where they began? Karounos writes that "The answer to the question of Austen's position on slavery is so simple as to have been overlooked: Fanny is Mansfield Park's slave."[569] Such a statement hits at the crux of the white feminist understanding of Austen I am

[566] Michael Karounos, "Ordination and Revolution in Mansfield Park," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 44, no. 4 (September 2004): 719, https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2004.0040.
[567] Karounos, 726.
[568] Karounos, 726.
[569] Karounos, 729.

exploring. Austen's abolitionism and progressivism operate through the systems her narratives protest and consequently perpetuate the oppressions of said systems.

Fanny's relationship to comfort throughout *Mansfield Park* functions to solidify the economic hierarchies of Mansfield Park and display her allegiance to its heteropatriarchy. At first ostracized, Fanny's discomfort is understandable for a child lacking an understanding of agency. As she grows—and the goodwill around her increasingly encourages her agency—Fanny remains within the comfort of her discomfort. Within this safe space of her affective discomfort, Fanny has recourse to a confirmed and stable identity: the poor and inferior relative. In such a position, Fanny is the emotional victim of her kin and community. The very discomfort that precludes her from activating her own voice thus becomes the telos of her narrative, and, as explored, this narrative subsumes others. Paradoxically, Fanny's personal discomfort with her failure to assimilate to the rigid power hierarchies ensures her complete assimilation through marriage to Edmund. In this contortion of affect and agency, Fanny performs the political affect of white feminism. Fanny's performance of unease brings Sir Thomas to ultimately realize that "Fanny was indeed the daughter he wanted."[570] Sir Thomas goes on to reflect that "His charitable kindness had been rearing a prime comfort for himself."[571] This conflation of charity, kindness, and comfort crystallizes comfort as a falsely disinterested virtue embedded within contemporary heteropatriarchal and colonial interests. And it is within these interests that Fanny ultimately finds herself resting comfortably.

Like many of Austen's texts, *Mansfield Park* unfolds when Britain was asserting global dominance, in large thanks to exploitative colonization that was altering the historical class power dynamics through an emergent middle class and new gentry members. The Bertrams have

[570] Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 467.
[571] Austen, 467.

managed to coalesce domestic and colonial wealth with the Mansfield Park estate holdings and Sir Bertram's baronet status; that Sir Betram sells the Mansfield Park parsonage to resolve his son Tom's debts is evidence of the continued significance of domestic land.[572] The intersecting models of economy mirrors *Clarissa*, as does the deployment of a young white women's virtue and body as a site of struggle for power in the changing socio-economic landscape. As the young woman who will produce the next generation of Bertrams, Fanny's character is burdened with meaning. Jenny Davidson writes, "*Mansfield Park* introduces gender as the new category indispensable for obtaining a place for virtue within the system of patronage."[573] The romance form, across the eighteenth century, illustrates with figures like Fanny how merely gender but specifically racialized gender is the key to unlock virtuousness and its social attachments. Though a dependent, Fanny usurps the position of those she depends on through Sir Bertram anointing her a daughter after his own daughter's social crimes and Fanny's union with Edmund. Through her affective obsequiousness, Fanny obtains the noble virtue that the rightful daughters can no longer procure. In keeping the Betram family line within its established kin network and assimilating into the gentry, Fanny functions as an intermediary between the two systems of domestic and imperial wealth.

Fanny's narrative of assimilation through the affective language of comfort is typical for Austen; Anne Elliot and Elizabeth Bennet likewise must suffer through their discomfort and arrive at psychic and physical congruence with the spaces around them. The romance form, over the eighteenth century, increasingly sees feminine virtue as an acquirable—and racialized—state. Virginia Cope writes how "By the time Austen is writing, […] female disinterest was a well-

[572] Tom's wasteful gambling and spending, as well as Sir Bertram's financial losses in the West Indies are a potential criticism of generational wealth and the instability of colonial wealth.
[573] Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness*, 148.

established convention."[574] Disinterest in the sentimental romance had an affective component. By the domestic romance, disinterest sheds the sentimental disavowal of fortune and body. The affective state comes to define disinterest. Writing on Anne Elliot and Elizabeth Bennet, Cope writes, "**Recognizing that disinterest like truth is an aspiration more often than a possibility, the quality is represented as a mental state."**[575] **Austen heroines lacked inheritances and social status that could provide them with security. Wealth and class were of utmost importance to those around Austen's heroines; Austen's humor is so often directed at those who obsess over such things. Her heroines, in contrast, are disinterested in that which could provide them with material and social comfort, according to their peers. This disinterest is what endears us to these heroines, along with their witty intellectualism, which unfolds from their disinterest in social conventions. From their disinterested divergence, these heroines undergo discomfort. And yet, their disinterest ultimately brings them to their suitors. Sympathizing with their suitors and progressing towards matrimony makes them comfortable. Disinterest becomes the means by which Austen's heroines achieve wealth and status. Austen's eroticization of skepticism seemingly serves to procure a new moral code for the gentry and bourgeoise classes. But, with the alleviation of the heroines' discomfort, skeptical ethics is subsumed into the parameters of socio-economic status. Skepticism becomes a tool of socio-economic acquisition, which feminine passivity—within the rhetoric of disinterest—can buy into.** Likewise, this same dynamic of acquisition and racialization defines Britain's methods for accumulating imperial dominance.

Edward Said fundamentally altered scholarly understanding of *Mansfield Park* in exhuming the Betram family's exploitive colonialism and reading how the narrative squares

[574] Cope, *Property, Education, and Identity in Late Eighteenth-Century Fiction Heroine of Disinterest*, 19.
[575] Cope, 19.

racial capitalism with the domestic order of Mansfield Park.[576] Susan Fraiman asks more of Edward Said's seminal argument. Fraiman writes,

> Surely Said is right to include her among those who made colonialism thinkable by constructing the West as center, home, and norm, while pushing everything else to the margins. The question I would raise is not whether Austen contributed to English domination abroad, but how her doing so was necessarily inflected and partly disrupted by her position as a bourgeois woman.[577]

It is this ambivalence, or lack of clarity, regarding Austen's relationship to imperialism that I highlight. The nebulous nature of this question and its responses bring this topic into the purview of affect. Fraiman constructs Austen in a manner similar to how Austen constructs Fanny: stuck surviving within a system. I am not seeking to indict Austen personally along political or ethical binaries but read the residue with which these narratives continue to exist. Part of this residue is a continually shifting landscape. Susan Lanser once sided with Fraiman's line of thinking, but revised her understanding years later. Responding to Helena Kelly's *Jane Austen, The Secret Radical* (2016), Lanser writes, "I would no longer make her out as what […] Helena Kelly oxymoronically dubs a secret radical.'"[578] In a footnote quoting scholar Mary Favret, Lanser adds, "that Elizabeth Bennet 'reserves the right to decide questions for herself'—seems to me standard liberal individualism and hardly radical in comparison with Austen's radical peers."[579]

In reading Austen, it is important to note, as Fraiman does, that Austen's heroines are, like Austen herself, dependent on others and as modern readers, our literacies necessarily affect

[576] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 80–96.
[577] Susan Fraiman, "Jane Austen and Edward Said: Gender, Culture, and Imperialism," in *Janeites*, ed. Deidre Lynch (Princeton University Press, 2001), 209, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691216089-012.
[578] Susan S. Lanser, "Aging with Austen," *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 133, no. 3 (May 2018): 658, https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2018.133.3.654.
[579] Lanser, n. 3 600.

our ability to read Austenian dependence. As *Pride and Prejudice* heroine Elizabeth Bennet tells Colonel Fitzwilliam, "'Now, seriously, what have you ever known of self-denial and dependence? When have you been prevented by want of money from going wherever you chose, or procuring any thing you had a fancy for?'"[580] Such a comment evinces the significance of relativity; for the Colonel, he is less privileged than his cousin, Mr. Darcy, upon whose whims his travels currently depend. Compared to both men, Elizabeth is more dependent on the social institutions around her. One could continue this line of thought, and thus engage in a so-called oppression Olympics that follows the hierarchies of privilege all the way down to the least privileged and most oppressed—and at this bottom, Elizabeth Bennet and her family would not be found. Such thinking is useful in recalling the hierarchal categorization at play in social roles and in Elizabeth's perspective. Extending her turn of phrase to this degree re-constructs Crenshaw's basement metaphor and problematizes the sympathy contract. The sympathy contract is based on degrees of relationality. Sympathy is constructed at a specific temporal moment between victim and viewer; here, Elizabeth is the victim and Fitzwilliam the viewer. Sympathy demands that the viewer and victim sport blinders that exclude those not within the direct sympathetic relation. Consequently, the pitfalls of the sympathy contract are more visible to a reader like myself, embedded in a more globally networked world, where the sufferings of multitudes are more readily available. The synchronic nature of Austen's narrative precludes this sympathetic multiplicity. The romance form of the eighteenth-century—which is still the foundation of modern romances—generally forecloses sympathetic multiplicity. From amatory fiction to domestic fiction, these narratives engage in totalizing and synchronic unions of sympathy.

[580] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Robert P. Irvine, Second edition, Broadview Editions (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2020), 181.

Further, sympathy as modeled in Austen adheres to the phenomenology of whiteness through the language of comfort that coincides with her novels' imperial backdrops. Sympathy reflects comfort, for sympathy in the Anglo-American understanding operates within a space of familiarity: the perspective of the spectator and the paradigms of Anglo-American narrative forms. To find comfort through Austen, even in her stories' most uncomfortable moments, is to sympathize with Austen's world. While that sympathy can take various forms, I argue that Austenian sympathy is largely that of whiteness. Austen masterfully crafts narratives wherein white women straddling class status leverage a seemingly modern individualistic agency to secure a higher-class status within a changing landscape marred with colonialism. Her narratives correlate individualism and white femininity, thus creating parallel associations between the positive ethical valuations of individualism's agency and modernity with white femininity's sympathetic sentimentalism and passivity. At the apex of this intersection rests whiteness and the socio-cultural mobility it ultimately provides through its conflation of aesthetic and affective dominance.

Chapter 4: Girlboss, Volume 1; or, The Passive Obedience of Postfeminism in Neoliberal Jane Austen Adaptations

The girl power of Jane Austen

In the 1990s, a tidal wave of Austen adaptations hit small and big screens, invigorating Austen's flame and bringing her to a new generation of fans. In the same period, another British phenomenon gained global recognition: the Spice Girls. Melanie Chisholm, Melanie Brown, Geri Halliwell, Emma Bunton, and Victoria Beckham were more known by their group alias and corresponding personas: Sporty Spice, Scary Spice, Baby Spice, Ginger Spice, and Posh Spice. The group, which ushered in an era of pop bands, was equally known for their glittery outfits and platform heels as for their energetic pop anthems. In their biggest hit "Wannabe" (1996), the young women sing: "I'll tell you what I want, what I really, really want / So tell me what you want, what you really, really want."[581] These lyrics are emblematic of the Spice Girls and their girl power rhetoric that shaped 1990s and early 2000s youth culture. The lyrics are declarations that announce to the world what these young women expect from their lovers. "I wanna, (ha) I wanna, (ha) I wanna, (ha) I wanna, (ha) / I wanna really, really, really wanna zigazig ah."[582] These declarative lines are half-formed, with the song's strong synth beats serving as the erotic punchline. The ensuing line, "If you wanna be my lover, you gotta get with my friends" remains a point of conversation, as the colloquial meaning of "get with" denotes sex.[583] Years later, Spice Girls fans—who were largely girls to young women in the late 1990s—continued to unite in misunderstanding over this line: "Despite the contradictory advice circulated in the late 1990s, if

[581] Spice Girls, "Wannabe," Spotify, *Spice* (Virgin Records, 1996), https://open.spotify.com/track/1Je1IMUlBXcx1Fz0WE7oPT?si=e7a4d96e26d740ef.
[582] Spice Girls, *Wannabe*.
[583] Spice Girls, *Wannabe*.

you wanna be my lover, please do not get with my friends," reads a 2014 Tumblr post that users shared and liked over 300,000 times.[584] What exactly did the Spice Girls want? Their record label, at least, wanted to sell music, and contradiction was the golden ticket for the Spice Girls' success. The Spice Girl's feminist brand of girl power embodied the contemporary postfeminist rhetoric that relied on contradiction for mass appeal.

A dilution of feminism arising within a booming mediasphere and in the aftermath of Reaganomics and Thatcherism, postfeminism rearticulates core tenets of feminism in circumscribed ways. Rosalind Gill describes postfeminism as a neoliberal "sensibility" rather than as a specific political stance.[585] As a sensibility, postfeminism describes an affective attitude towards contemporary feminisms in the neoliberal era. The core facets of postfeminism according to Gill are "the emphasis upon choice and autonomy, the focus on women's bodies as their source of value and the centrality of ideas of 'makeover,' including the requirement to 'upgrade' one's psychic life to be positive, confident and glowing."[586] Postfeminism feminizes neoliberal edicts, namely the individualization of systemic problems to obfuscate structural inequalities. Heavily dependent on neoliberal commodity culture, postfeminism serves the neoliberal illusion of meritocracy. Anyone can be a feminine citizen, if they buy the right clothes as mandated by women's culture. Under postfeminism gender becomes the sole oppression in Anglo-American culture *or* gender equality has been achieved. Either way, postfeminism upholds a gender binary that perpetuates the oppressive ideologies it purports to refute. In this way, "a postfeminist sensibility recentres both heterosexuality and whiteness, as well as

[584] vancouvervancouvervancouver-dea, "Despite the Contradictory Advice," Tumblr, accessed May 14, 2024, https://iwantacheeseburger.tumblr.com/post/26780927821/americagiveup-despite-the-contradictory-advice.
[585] Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (May 2007): 147–66, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407075898.
[586] Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill, and Catherine Rottenberg, "Postfeminism, Popular Feminism and Neoliberal Feminism? Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in Conversation," *Feminist Theory* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2020): 5, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700119842555.

fetishising a young, able-bodied, 'fit' (understood as both healthy, and in its more contemporary sense as 'attractive') female body."[587] Postfeminism functions in service of neoliberal capitalism, perpetuating an ideal femininity that reaches back into the eighteenth century. Neoliberalism spans decades that witness massive technological and political shifts; and within these shifts, postfeminism holds fast. Postfeminism circumvents traditional feminist epistemology that writes its history in "waves." Delineating between third- and fourth-wave feminisms is not necessary, for postfeminism speaks to affective continuities across these terms and differing politics.

Postfeminism, as I use it, describes mainstream, commercialized versions of feminism in the neoliberal era that mobilize trendy aesthetics and espouses empowerment through heteropatriarchal rhetoric.[588] The logic of postfeminism is evident in the Spice Girls' "girl power" tagline and the "girlboss" rhetoric of the 2010s. The Spice Girls adopted their "girl power" tagline to channel their frustration with the sexism they faced in the music industry. While the line is a call for empowerment, the term "girl" perpetuates an infantilization that the twenty-somethings did not dispel but embraced. Indeed, that embrace of infantilization is part of the point of not only the Spice Girls but also postfeminism generally. Susan Douglas writes, "Negotiation was what the Spice Girls were all about: between sexual objectification and feminist politics, between female bonding and pursuing male approval, between self-respect and self-display."[589] Ambivalence is another way of describing the Spice Girls' negotiation. "They insisted that girls could have it both ways, to capitulate to—and even embrace—male fantasies

[587] Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture," 25.
[588] I deliberately say versions because simultaneous subcultures of postfeminism co-exist, appealing to different demographics of women's culture. *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), for example, was a postfeminist show that coincided in popularity with the Spice Girls. The show was targeted at older audiences but spoke to a girl power feminism.
[589] Susan J Douglas, *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism: How Pop Culture Took Us from Girl Power to Girls Gone Wild*, (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2011), 19.

about how young women should look and dress," Douglas writes.[590] This conflicted attitude was integral to marketing the Spice Girls into a global phenomenon.

Another global phenomenon profited from postfeminism too: Jane Austen. The ambivalence of postfeminism was also, it turns out, well-suited for marketing Jane Austen to a new generation of consumers. In the 1990s, the ironic instability of Jane Austen's canon met with the ambivalences of postfeminism to become Austenmania. Austenmania describes the sudden glut of Austen adaptations in the 1990s, followed by increasingly unwieldy adaptations and merchandizing in the 2000s and 2010s. The year 1995 alone saw the debut of a *Pride and Prejudice* BBC miniseries; a *Persuasion* BBC film that played in US cinemas; a *Sense and Sensibility* film directed and written by Ang Lee and Emma Thompson, respectively; and *Clueless*, Amy Heckerling's Beverly Hills adaptation of *Emma.* In the following year, Helen Fielding published *Bridget Jones's Diary*, a retelling of *Pride and Prejudice*. In 1998, *Jones's Diary* landed in the US. In 2001 it became a hit film starring Colin Firth, Hugh Grant, and Renée Zellweger.[591] *Bridget Jones's Diary* incarnated a new romance form, and in so doing solidified Jane Austen's postfeminist canonization.

Remaining within my deliberately critical reading of Austen, this chapter focuses on how these 1990s adaptations translate the eighteenth-century romance form and Austen's canon into the neoliberal landscape; the following chapter examines more recent postfeminist imaginings that reconfigure tenets of the romance form within an increasingly digital world. These re-packagings of Austen illustrate how eighteenth-century affects and forms are a locus for mediating neoliberal citizenship. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Austenmania develops the

[590] Douglas, 19.
[591] Due to the spatial constraints of this project, I do not attend to the film adaptation, which alters some of the book's plot.

postfeminism neoliberal imagining of Austen in which Austen and her characters—preeminently Elizabeth Bennet—symbolize feminine individualism rooted in commodity culture. These adaptations construct this characterization of Austen by reconfiguring Austen as a purveyor of neoliberal comfort. This comfort is decidedly postfeminist in its emphasis on material and ideological comforts.

In the tradition of amatory fiction, Austenmania postfeminism continues to generate comfort through constructing an affective space for erotic play; the influences of sentimental and domestic fiction are evident in how postfeminism emphasizes sympathetic relations as an attainable location of comfort for the aspiring feminine citizen. Postfeminism adaptations like *Bridget Jones's Diary* assert sympathy as an affective contract because the larger mass market manufactures a greater claim of relatability alongside the heroine's characterization as a working girl striving for love. Building out the Enlightenment-era romance form, the heroine's overwrought emotions over her romantic, professional, social, and family lives are ethical displays of emotional catharsis that demand sympathy from feminine citizens, because a refutation implies an ethical disagreement over gender and sexual politics. Such a dynamic asserts that the heroine's affect rather than her situational experiences are the crux of her sympathetic demand. Iterated through the perspective of a white woman proximate to the ideal, sympathy is whitewashed. This whitewashed sympathy offers multifold comfort: in the heroine's intimacy with white patriarchy, in the continual repetition of her narrative, and in the radical potential briefly offered while the liminality of the romance form suspends her in her struggle to conform. With its intimate look into its heroine's emotional interiority and surrounding affect, the postfeminist romance form offers a political and accessible critique of neoliberal heteropatriarchy, but forecloses progressive subversion by commodifying the heroine's affect

within neoliberalism. Neoliberalism's abstraction of citizenry and the good life, in tandem with individualization, amplifies the socio-economic nature of white femininity. The sympathy contract is more like a sympathy economy, within which feminine citizens must barter their affect for socio-cultural status. In tandem with postfeminist consumerism, the neoliberal romance form scripts feminine desire through commodity eroticism.

Eating peas like Elizabeth Bennet

The neoliberal romanticization of Austen depends heavily on the popularization of digital media like film and television; Austenmania encouraged a conflation of Austen's canon and period adaptations. "Austen fannishness is now so widespread (and commercialized) that the lines between canon and fanon are blurred considerably," Holly Luetkenhaus and Zoe Weinstein write.[592] In 2021, YouTuber Abbie Emmons made a video titled "Why everyone loves Mr. Darcy (Pride and Prejudice Character Analysis)."[593] The YouTube video has over 1.5 million views as of this writing. The video opens with a clip from the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*, when Elizabeth rejects Darcy. The film adaptation heightens the erotics into a palpable sexual tension absent from the novel. Quivering lips and lingering stares stand in for the emotional turmoil of each character. "Come on, you were supposed to kiss her!" exclaims Emmons. Emmons uses the film to ground her analysis of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* rather than the text. In this way, Emmons conflates film and novel. Emmons's video intersplices clips from the film with Emmons sitting watching the clips on a computer in a sleek, white office. The Austen of which Emmons speaks is within the same canon as *Clueless* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as well as Etsy shirts and mugs

[592] Holly Luetkenhaus and Zoe Weinstein, *Austentatious: The Evolving World of Jane Austen Fans*, Fandom & Culture (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019), 10.
[593] "Why Everyone Loves Mr. Darcy (Pride and Prejudice Character Analysis) - YouTube," accessed June 28, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ-Ua6NYago&ab_channel=AbbieEmmons.

with Lady Catherine's pronouncement of Elizabeth Bennet as an "Obstinate, headstrong girl!"[594] A video on Jane Austen's characters from the PBS digital program "It's Lit!" has the following description: "These women reveal to us Jane Austen's insight into her growth as an author, her politics, and just how she feels about what makes a girlboss and #girlboss."[595] Louis Menand, in *The New Yorker*, writes

> Today, there are two Austens, with, probably, a fair amount of overlap: the recreational reader's Austen and the English professor's Austen. For the recreational reader, the novels are courtship stories, and the attraction is the strong women characters who, despite the best efforts of rivals and relations to screw things up, always succeed in making the catch. 'Boy meets girl, girl gets boy' is the bumper-sticker version.[596]

Menand encapsulates a particular reading of Austen that is invested in the sincere rather than skeptical or ironic. Menand's casual and succinct language describes the neoliberal consumption of Austen. This consumption, as Menand's style implies in its brevity, has become cultural shorthand for the Austen of women's culture. Familiar in their imagery, Austen's narratives have become cozy romances. Her textual worlds offer a nostalgic simplicity to the reader. Even though her heroines are often selling themselves on the marriage market, their network of family and friends offer up sprawling country estates where elaborate meals, classy balls, and meandering walks appear to be the main activities. Devoid of congested urban landscapes or congested suburban work commutes—and with only brief looks at the mechanisms behind

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[594] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 311.
[595] *The Women of Jane Austen | It's Lit!*, accessed July 12, 2022, https://www.thirteen.org/programs/its-lit/the-women-of-jane-austen-d5dhww/.
[596] Condé Nast, "How to Misread Jane Austen," The New Yorker, September 24, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/10/05/how-to-misread-jane-austen.

family fortunes and the stakes of *not* marrying, Austen's novels seemingly offer its readers a world where the biggest problem is keeping up a witty repartee with a suitor sporting a smoldering look. While rakish suitors must be avoided, they're still cute to look at and non-violent in comparison to earlier rakes. And, the heroine *always* has a suitor, whose attentions may fall elsewhere, but that competition feels like nothing compared to the neoliberal dating scene. The source of many romance tropes, Austen romances offer heterosexual predictability. Structured around love, bathed in humor, and with very real monetary concerns softened by plush estates, Austen's novels balance a removal from and intimacy with the modern reader's life to generate an erotic pleasure.

The 1990s and 2000s Austenmania adaptations embed comfort into their aesthetics, albeit a neoliberal comfort. These adaptations of Austen propagate Austen as luscious romantic films that err on the side of playful comedy rather than high-risk drama. Kathryn Sutherland, writing generally on-screen adaptations of Austen, notes how period pieces are so keen to portray the past inaccurately. She writes, "we have yet to see an Austen heroine authentically eating peas from her knife in a meagerly furnished room in accordance with Austen-Leigh's memory of how things were among the lesser gentry at the start of the nineteenth century."[597] Sutherland aptly notes how film history—namely early cinema's penchant for epic spectacle—and the difficulties of translating the rich detail of text to image conjoin to create such apocryphal displays of Austen. She writes, "Thanks to the meticulous labours of archival researchers and designers, even period squalor exhibits a lavish material excess."[598]

[597] Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 344.
[598] Sutherland, 344.

Excess predominates Austen even in the modern era; material and emotional excess demarcate a romantic nostalgia. Wendy Anne Lee, in her study on insensibility, reads Austen's style against the film adaptation *Sense and Sensibility* (2005). Lee argues that Austen generates emotional distance that appears unfeeling, or "insensible." But insensibility is not cruel; rather, Austen's insensibility encourages sympathetic intimacy. This circular logic operates akin to disinterest and white femininity, wherein a feminine citizen's intra- and interpersonal dynamics present as inert, passive, and lacking, so as to require the assistance of superior entity: white patriarchy. Lee asserts Austen's general narratorial style and her social dynamics in *Sense and Sensibility* as insensible. Insensibility is an inscrutability that demands increased attention, thus forcing an intimacy and sympathetic allegiance between reader and text, or characters. In the novel, Elinor Dashwood is a master of insensibility, closing herself off to other characters in such a way that the reader feels more for her. Writing on the scene when Elinor learns that Lucy Steele is engaged to her beloved Edward Ferrars, Lee argues that "*Sense and Sensibility* traffics in moments when speaking is out of the question because you have no words or there is too much to say or the sound of your own voice is excruciating."[599] Sympathetic silence is erased in the 2005 film. Lee points out the particularly emotive moment wherein Marianne realizes her sister has been burdened with the news of Edward Ferrars's engagement. While Austen doles out the emotions of this scene through what remains unsaid in Elinor's language, the film adds sobs and embraces, making physically manifest the internally felt. In turning the emotions outward, the film aligns with Marianne's ontology. Emotions will come out, because they lead to a better visual narrative, if nothing else. Writing on the 1995 and 2008 *Sense and Sensibility* adaptations, Jillian Heydt-Stevenson considers how the films rewrite Austen's notion of happiness and argues

[599] Lee, *Failures of Feeling*, 130.

that Austen separates happiness and pleasure, whereas the films suture the two together in a notably heterosexual eroticism.[600] The erotic arises in the visual portrayal of the suitors. A non-canonical duel between Brandon and Willoughby; the charming hesitancy of Hugh Grant (who also stars as the Wickham-inspired rake of *Bridget Jones's Diary*) as Edward Ferrars—the material aesthetics of these character portrayals are vaguely associated with the Regency era through their broadly romantic attachments.

These depictions enable the modern romance plot of the films, wherein, as Heydt-Stevenson writes, "In keeping with the romantic love plot's best conventions, both films show Marianne falling in love before she marries, not after."[601] In the cinematic realm, the ironies and exigencies of Austen's era are replaced with modern escapism and emotional logic. This emotional logic demands that an embarrassment of emotional riches await our lovers at the end of the narrative. In the meantime, viewers themselves are provided with an excessive indulgence, made acceptable through a supposed temporal distance. Laura Mooneyham White writes, "contemporary viewers could indulge their need for romance while playing the spectator-tourist of elegant estates peopled by pretty actors."[602] White's argument that these films create a modern nostalgic simulacrum directly aligns with my own understanding of the broader Austen universe.

With their nostalgic excess, these adaptations generate comfort—a variation of the comfort previously examined in Austen's texts. This neoliberal comfort similarly orients the reader toward whiteness, but with an emphasis on materiality and exteriorization derived from neoliberal ideologies. This comfort cozies up to the citizens of women's culture, providing them

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[600] Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, "Happiness in Austen's 'Sense and Sensibility' and Its Afterlife in Film," in *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, ed. Daniel Cook and Nicholas Seager (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 254.
[601] Heydt-Stevenson, 263.
[602] Laura Mooneyham White, "Jane Austen's World as Postmodern Simulacrum in Fielding's Narratives of Bridget Jones," *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 24 (January 1, 2002): 257.

refuge in their chase of the good life. Berlant writes, "The desire for a less-bad life involves finding resting places; the reproduction of normativity occurs when rest is imagined nostalgically—that is, in the places where rest is supposed to have happened, a fantasy masquerading as screen memory or paramnesia."[603] This nostalgic envisioning of rest on the good life journey offers a psychic break from the demands of daily life. And this media consumption can promote the good life—if an individual develops affective attachments that orient her towards the ideological investments of the media object. With enough comfort, the individual-cum-citizen meshes seamlessly with surrounding cultural orientations. Describing this process, Sara Ahmed writes, "To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins."[604] Comfort interpellates the individual into a citizen who enacts cultural scripts such as the romance form. Subsequently, comfort keeps citizens wrapped in an inert state, such that the entity behind the comfortable object directs the actions of citizens. Swathed in the comfort of the romance form, the form begins to direct feminine citizens to become their mode of life. Embodying the romance mode in obedience to cultural norms alleviates the romance citizen's need to make decisions. Berlant writes, "sovereignty, while ideal, is a nightmarish burden, a psychotic loneliness, and just tainted."[605] Preferable is the comfort of conformity and its subsummation of agency because they proffer relationality, purpose, and security. The feminine citizen, according to Berlant, "becomes happy in an ordinary, often lovely, way, because the weight of being in the world is being distributed into space, time, noise, and other beings."[606] This happiness is, in truth, a de-

[603] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 180.
[604] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Second edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 148.
[605] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 43.
[606] Berlant, 43.

activation of the subject. “In a relation of cruel optimism our activity is revealed as a vehicle for attaining a kind of passivity, as evidence of the desire to find forms in relation to which we can sustain a coasting sentience, in response to being too alive.”[607]

With its ready-made nostalgia and philosophical deployment of heterosexual love, Austen’s canon is primed for comfort. In a *New York Times* essay, Susan Chira captures the comfort Austen provides to neoliberal citizens. Chira describes how *Pride and Prejudice*’s predictability was “the perfect escape” from a serious illness.[608] Re-readings leverage the text into a “guilty pleasure;”[609] because the plot is so familiar, Chira can savor Austen’s dialogue and perceive her cutting humor. More importantly, the stakes of *Pride and Prejudice* are low to the modern reader. “The most serious crisis is the seduction of Elizabeth’s sister and how it affects her marriageability.”[610] Chira recognizes Austen’s moral interest, which influences Austen’s satirical style. Yet, Austen’s cultural critiques occur within an organized system. “Like the grounds at Pemberley, an inherent order shapes the physical and moral landscape. Nature is tamed, and human nature too.”[611] This order is the logic of whiteness and the brewing hegemony of racial capitalism. This order confirms the world within which the reader lives, and thus provides comfort. Chira writes, “Jane Austen’s self-enclosed world enveloped me, soothing in its contours and assumptions. I didn’t know the end of my own story, and my mind raced toward horror.”[612] Under the pressures of neoliberalism, Austen’s comfort becomes more comforting—both confirming racial capitalism while providing a respite from its lived experiences.

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[607] Berlant, 43.
[608] Susan Chira, “In Trying Times, the Balm of Jane Austen,” *The New York Times*, December 23, 2016, sec. Books, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/23/books/review/in-trying-times-the-balm-of-jane-austen.html.
[609] Chira.
[610] Chira.
[611] Chira.
[612] Chira.

Historical adaptations soften Austen's moral exigencies towards neoliberal orientations; this softening is partly dependent on the consumer's predilections. While Austen adaptations depict neoliberal white femininity, Austen is not explicitly a white feminist—the white feminism I locate in Austen and eighteenth-century media is a genealogical source for social belonging under white supremacy and misreadings that exploit Austen's satire. In an article for *Chronicle*, Nicole Wright examines such misreadings of Austen amongst far-right readers. "Venturing into the mire, I found that there are several variations of alt-right Jane Austen: 1) symbol of sexual purity; 2) standard-bearer of a vanished white traditional culture; and 3) exception that proves the rule of female inferiority."[613] The aesthetic of Austen becomes metonymic for this imagined white utopia. In "the cozy England of Austen—a much-beloved author with a centuries-long fandom and an unebbing academic following—the alt-right normalizes itself in the eyes of ordinary people."[614] This "normalizing" is evidence that the alt-right envisioning of Austen is nominally baked into a mainstream conception of Austen. This conception extends to the cottagecore aesthetic, which weaves nostalgic heritage and modern living.[615] And it is in this deployment of Austen that she becomes a postfeminist icon. Take a gander on Etsy, where there are countless Jane Austen products for sale (Figure 6). Most are *Pride and Prejudice* items. Of these, the majority are items related to the 2005 film, including t-shirts and a set of spoons with quotes not in Austen's text. White, typically blonde women, model the clothes; neutral-toned

[613] Nicole M. Wright, "Alt-Right Jane Austen," The Chronicle of Higher Education, March 12, 2017, https://www.chronicle.com/article/alt-right-jane-austen/.
[614] Wright.
[615] An interesting parallel in the alt-right co-option of Jane Austen is the alt-right co-option of Taylor Swift. Since discovering that that audience deems her an "Aryan goddess," Swift has denounced the epithet and white supremacy as "repulsive." Swift is, similar to Austen, tied aesthetically to cottagecore culture. Leah Donnella, "Taylor Swift, Aryan Goddess?," *NPR*, May 27, 2016, sec. Goats and Soda, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/05/27/479462825/taylor-swift-aryan-goddess; Brian Hiatt, "Taylor Swift: The Rolling Stone Interview," *Rolling Stone* (blog), September 18, 2019, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/taylor-swift-rolling-stone-interview-880794/.

minimalist backdrops provide an apocryphal countryside nostalgia. Your local bookstore likely also has an Austen mug for purchase, or one of those religious candles with Austen taking the place of a saint. Acquire any of these items and you can signal your Austen virtues, just as *Pamela* fans did with the teacups.[616]

While these products and adaptations like the 1995 *Sense and Sensibility* profess a historical and textual fidelity, modern reimaginings of Austen adaptions have become increasingly popular such as *Clueless* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*; canon-defying stories bordering on the fantastical, from *Lost in Austen* (2008) to *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009 book, 2016 film); Janeite fan films such as *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007), *Miss Austen Regrets* (2007), and *Austenland* (2013); period adaptations with modern aesthetics, such as *Emma.* (2020). Luetkenhaus and Weinstein, discussing these adaptation trends, commend the cult classic *Clueless* for the way in which the film transplants Austen's irony in *Emma* to 1990s Beverly Hills. *Clueless*, the authors write, "tapped into a convergence of several different pop culture trends at once: Austen films, teen films, and third-wave feminism."[617] Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* likewise capitalizes on third-wave feminism, within the larger sensibility of postfeminism. Published in 1996, the book became a film in 2001 with sequels in 2004 and 2016. The eponymous character recounts her Austen-inspired narrative in a diary, counting not only her encounters with the standoffish Mark Darcy played by Colin Firth (who also starred in the BBC's well-received 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*) but also her weight and daily cigarette intake. "Bridget's sagging commitment to feminist principles shows itself repeatedly," writes

[616] Williams, *The Social Life of Books*, 226.
[617] Holly Luetkenhaus and Zoe Weinstein, *Austentatious: The Evolving World of Jane Austen Fans*, Fandom & Culture (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019), 38.

Laura Mooneyham White.[618] White argues Jones is more like Cher, the teenage star of *Clueless*, than Elizabeth Bennet or any other Austen character.[619]

Chain-smoking with Elizabeth Bennet

Widely known as both novel and film character, Bridget Jones became the leading figure of chick lit. A derisive term for women-centric novels that lie closer to romance fiction than literary fiction, chick lit adapts the romance form within a postfeminist sensibility. Following the lead of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Sex and the City,* chick lit centralizes a single woman of middle-class origins whose sexually liberated status has not procured her a husband. With this character focus, chick lit speaks to a generation of women drawn to urban areas and living independently amidst cultural panic over delayed and dwindling marriage rates. In some ways, chick lit is the domestic novel of the neoliberal era, with critical caveats: the lack of satire in chick lit's irony, or the dissipation of irony entirely; the acceptance of the heteropatriarchal, socio-economic status quo; a hyperfixation on the individual; a career typically in media that illogically supports an urban lifestyle. What Austen and chick lit do share is a predilection for courtship and realism. The meaning of these two constructs, especially realism, are approached very differently. Realism, for chick lit, is more akin to taking off one's bra at the end of the day: a brief respite that resides within the cultural schematics that establish the need for such a respite. Vivien Jones writes, "The 'ordinariness' which is said to distinguish the genre involves a shared sigh of relief that it's fine to admit that you're not superwoman, the impossible ideal assumed to

[618] Laura Mooneyham White, "Jane Austen's World as Postmodern Simulacrum in Fielding's Narratives of Bridget Jones," *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 24 (January 1, 2002): 258–59.
[619] White, 259.

emanate from seventies feminism."[620] This brand of realism recapitulates the ideal model within a strain of authenticity, similar to the affective resistance of passive obedience; as long as one assumes an authentic irony towards the demands of neoliberalism, one can safely *fail* while also continuing to live within its paradigm. This irony is akin to that of Catherine Morland being our heroine despite *not* being a heroine. Whereas Austen treats this irony with a heavy dose of satire that forces an ethical consideration, chick lit stops at irony as a mechanism against individual failure. White writes of the parallels and divergences between Bridget Jones's and Elizabeth Bennet's stories: "the crowning irony of Fielding's use of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* is that Bridget's romance is less deep, less feminist, than Elizabeth's and Darcy's or Anne's and Wentworth's."[621] White writes,

> Modeling a contemporary plot on Austen's courtship plots thus can evoke nostalgic desire—desire for seemingly unproblematic romance, for relatively stable conceptions of class and gender, and for knowable conventions of courtship. This desire is intensified by contrast, for instance, to the wild chaos Bridget herself perceives in modern dating practices.[622]

That Bridget *perceives* and lives out this chaos is critical. With the authentic and ordinary rewritten as chaos, the nostalgic ideal and its modern parallel of immanent femininity becomes even more urgent. For to live chaotically is to live in discomfort, the antithesis of Austen's comfortable world. Chick lit novels like *Bridget Jones's Diary* long for comfort, but not quite the comfort of Austen; rather, chick lit narrativizes the comfort of postfeminism. The ambivalences

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[620] Vivien Jones, "Post-Feminist Austen," *Critical Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2010): 67, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8705.2010.01949.x.
[621] Laura Mooneyham White, "Jane Austen's World as Postmodern Simulacrum in Fielding's Narratives of Bridget Jones," *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 24 (January 1, 2002): 259.
[622] White, "Jane Austen's World as Postmodern Simulacrum in Fielding's Narratives of Bridget Jones," 260–61.

of postfeminism serve as waypoints of cruel optimism in the neoliberal imagining of the good life.

Towards the end of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Bridget watches the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in a meta-moment that exemplifies postfeminist women culture's adoption of Austen. Bridget treats the BBC airing of their adaptation as a national holiday. While purchasing cigarettes in preparation, Bridget remarks on the traffic: "Hard to believe there are so many cars out on the roads. Shouldn't they be at home getting ready?"[623] Bridget, who is herself preparing for her viewing, projects her ritual onto others. "Love the nation being so addicted," she continues to write, as though the nation is paralleling her viewing experience.[624] Bridget's projections continue even when describing her personal affinity to the Austen adaptation. Critically, Bridget is attached to the adaptation and not Austen's text, which goes unmentioned; further, she, perhaps like her quixotic predecessor Arabella, hyperfocuses on the sexual aspect of the romance plot. "The basis of my own addiction, I know, is my simple human need for Darcy to get off with Elizabeth."[625] Bridget compares her affinity to football, the national sport traditionally associated with men; indeed, Bridget describes "men's obsession" with football.[626] With this comparison, Bridget affirms her embrace of heteronormativity. She likens how fans see football players as surrogates to her view of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet. "They are my chosen representatives in the field of shagging, or, rather, courtship," she explains.[627] Courtship is a pivotal word choice. It draws out a nostalgic investment in *Pride and Prejudice* that Bridget's ensuing thoughts likewise describe. "I do not, however, wish to see any actual goals. I

[623] Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 215.
[624] Fielding, 215.
[625] Fielding, 215.
[626] Fielding, 215.
[627] Fielding, 215.

would hate to see Darcy and Elizabeth in bed, smoking a cigarette afterwards. That would be unnatural and wrong and I would quickly lose interest."[628] The appeal of *Pride and Prejudice* is its portrayal of a non-modern romance. Bridget later describes her horror at seeing the actors intimately posed out of character. "Apparently they are already sleeping together. That is absolutely disgusting. Feel disorientated and worried, for surely Mr. Darcy would never do anything so vain and frivolous as to be an actor and yet Mr. Darcy is an actor."[629] Bridget quixotically conflates character and actor, with the consequence that Bridget anticipates Austen's narrative outside of the textual world.

Ironically, though she has a desperate desire for matrimony that Elizabeth lacks, Bridget *is* living the modern adaptation in which she claims no interest. The overlap between *Jones's Diary* and *Pride and Prejudice* is somewhat acknowledged when Bridget and her friend Jude dissect the appeal of Austen's and Fielding's Mr. Darcys. The pair "spent twenty minutes growling, 'Fawaw, that Mr. Darcy,'" displaying their erotic interest.[630] "I love the way he talks," Bridget writes, "sort of as if he can't be bothered. Ding-dong!"[631] Bridget's "ding-dong" is a brief recognition of her own attachment to emotionally distant men–and arguably a more general cultural attachment to Mr. Darcy, for in emphasizing his disengagement, he can become the hope of a feminine citizen: a man who suddenly professes a long-harbored love, and who strives to remediate the complaints of his beloved. Bridget somewhat reads Wendy Anne Lee's insensibility into Mr. Darcy, finding erotic allure in his stony haughtiness—though Mr. Darcy's vulnerability, and not his distance, eventually draws in Elizabeth. This distant haughtiness also describes Bridget's Mark Darcy, the son of her parents' friends whom her mother tried to set her

[628] Fielding, 215.
[629] Fielding, 216.
[630] Fielding, 215.
[631] Fielding, 215.

up with at the beginning of the year. “Do you remember Mark, darling?” her mother asks, sounding like Mrs. Bennet.[632] “He's one of those top-notch barristers. Masses of money. Divorced.”[633] Bridget realizes the similarities between Mr. Darcy and Mark for she next writes, “Then [Jude and I] had a long discussion about the comparative merits of Mr. Darcy and Mark Darcy, both agreeing that Mr. Darcy was more attractive because he was ruder.”[634] Rather than initiate moral probing, Austen’s text becomes a means for confirming Bridget’s extant attachments. Bridget, with the help of the adaptation’s emphasis on excess, turns Austen’s philosophical and erotic skepticism into a “will-they-won’t-they” plot that conventionally fits into Bridget’s own life. The world of Austen redirects Bridget right back to herself and her romantic life, but it is the world adapted for Bridget’s contemporary citizenry, stuffed with greater eroticism. Through this updated Austen, Bridget, a stand-in for the reader, is a feminine citizen whose attachments to women’s culture subsume her so much that she enters the romance mode.

Framed through racial capitalism, the rom-com of the Bridget Jones ilk is an erotic triangulation of normativity, irony, and authenticity—as, too, is an Austen novel. Yet in the modern rom-com envisioning, this erotic triangulation is more material. Quite literally, materialism and desire are united in protagonists; consider *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic* (2000, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* in the US), in which the main protagonist’s compulsive shopping intersects with a courtship narrative. While debt becomes an issue for the shopaholic, the neoliberal romance form hardly critiques consumerism; rather, adhering to the postfeminist sensibility, consumerism is a means of empowerment. Material goods provide erotic

[632] Fielding, 9.
[633] Fielding, 9.
[634] Fielding, 215.

pleasure for the heroine, whether acquired through her own means or through her suitor. With access to material goods an assumption in the chick lit genre—alongside the stark lack of diversity and a romantic union with a conventionally well-off man, the novels accept racial capitalism as the status quo. Austen, in contrast, emphasizes aesthetics in a different manner.

While architecture and landscape are critical in Austen, their aesthetics typically serve to prompt a philosophical conversation or generate an affective experience of comfort or discomfort. The most extended example of architecture's affective potential is the terror that Catherine Morland finds in Northanger Abbey. Eventually Catherine learns to read skeptically, which is often the aim of space in Austen, whether inter- or intrapersonally. The sight of Pemberley awes Elizabeth Bennet not because it is a great heritage estate bespeaking nostalgia and luxury; rather, the virtues of the estate that appeal to Elizabeth are Darcy's personal virtues. Mrs. Reynolds, a servant at Pemberley, tells Elizabeth and her aunt and uncle, "'There is not one of his tenants of servants but what will give him a good name.'"[635] With this different insight into Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth's emotions begin to shift. Upon viewing a portrait of him, Elizabeth recognizes this shift in herself.

> There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. […] she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before.[636]

That Darcy chooses goodwill over harsh treatment in his position as a landowner resonates with Elizabeth's moral sentiments. Pemberley challenges Elizabeth's assumptions of Darcy because it

[635] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 230.
[636] Austen, 231.

makes visible his ethical care, in terms of his relationships with his staff and the immaculate orderliness of the estate. Pemberley's aesthetics are not the erotic draw for Elizabeth. Pemberley instantiates skeptical empiricism and Darcy's interiority, which is the erotic allure for Elizabeth. After accidentally crossing Mr. Darcy's path, Elizabeth and her family continue into the elaborate park. Her family, and the reader, witness the "beautiful walk"—a sight in which various adaptations luxuriate.[637] But "it was some time before Elizabeth was sensible of any of it […]. Her thoughts were all fixed on that one spot of Pemberley House, whichever it might be, where Mr. Darcy then was. She longed to know what at that moment was passing in his mind."[638] Even though Pemberley conflates ethical virtue, skeptical eroticism and socio-economic wealth, *Pride and Prejudice*'s romance narrative does not depend on materialism. On the other hand, a love plot in *Bridget Jones's Diary* hinges on her short skirt. And when Bridget visits Mark Darcy's house for his parents' anniversary party, she and her family fixate on the house's architecture and the party décor.

> Next we were ushered down a dramatic curved pale wood stairway lit by red heart-shaped candles on each step. Downstairs was one vast room, with a dark wood floor and a conservatory giving onto the garden. The whole room was lit by candles. Dad and I just stood and stared, completely speechless.[639]

Mark exhibits his moral goodness because he laid out the candles himself. Mark adds to the aesthetic of excess of his family's old-fashioned house. This mix of nostalgic and excess piques Bridget's interest in Darcy. Her erotic desire is rooted in commodity culture. Based on her

[637] Austen, 233.
[638] Austen, 233.
[639] Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 200.

reaction, Bridget would love Ciamara's house in *Love in Excess*. Bridget lacks the rationality of amatory fiction's material eroticism, as well as the introspection of Austen's skeptical eroticism.

Living through Austen's social critiques, Elizabeth Bennet's introspection guides her towards personal change. Dependent on the capitalist culture around her, Bridget's world is fixed. The stark contrast of these worlds is evident in the texts' first lines. *Pride and Prejudice* begins, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."[640] In contrast, Bridget's diary opens with a list of New Year's resolutions. "I WILL NOT Drink more than fourteen alcohol units a week."[641] Other habits she intends to stop include: "Smoke. Waste money […]. Sulk about having no boyfriend, but develop inner poise and authority and sense of self as woman of substance, complete without boyfriend, as best way to obtain boyfriend."[642] The habits she aspires to include "Stop smoking. Reduce circumference of thighs by 3 inches. […] Form functional relationship with responsible adult."[643] This list of New Year's Resolutions cements a singular narrative perspective versus Austen's free indirect discourse. This perspective is awash in postfeminism, with anxious attention to appearance, consumerism, and romance. Bridget immediately fails to follow through on multiple resolutions—which is unsurprising given their stringent parameters—by pursuing a relationship with her boss at her publishing job. Days into the new year, her boss, Daniel Cleaver, sends her a message at work regarding the shortness of her skirt. Cleaver, in his role as Captain Wickham, captivates Bridget with a charm that belies his intentions. Bridget later discovers Cleaver with another woman and learns Cleaver slept with Mark Darcy's wife weeks after their wedding. These changes are more sexually explicit, in keeping with modern mores. Cleaver's affronts

[640] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 41.
[641] Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 2.
[642] Fielding, 2.
[643] Fielding, 3.

speak to shifts in reputation and the dynamic between personal and public life. Unlike Lydia and her family, no honor is threatened. Bridget suffers humiliation and is uncomfortable enough at work that she leaves her job. Their affair further blurred the divide between personal and professional lives that neoliberalism obscures. While Bridget finds another job as a television journalist, Cleaver lingers on her mind. Two months after the breakup, Bridget proudly writes, "obsessive thoughts about Daniel 0."[644] Even later, she writes, "Now it is nearly Christmas, find self feeling sentimental about Daniel."[645] Between these emotional admissions and her unflinchingly honest self-criticisms, Bridget inaugurates the chick lit realism.

This realism is that of an authenticity that brokers normativity with irony. This authenticity, unlike Austen's realism, generates identification through cultural familiarity rather than introspective inquiry. Bridget is relatable whereas Elizabeth is inspirational. This difference is seen in how each character is differentiated from their milieu and suffers public dismissal. Elizabeth is admired for her moral integrity; she refuses Mr. Darcy and confronts Lady Catherine de Bourgh based on her value system. "*You* may ask questions, which *I* shall not choose to answer," she declares to Lady Catherine.[646] Elizabeth stands out from her sisters and other women because of her commitment to herself. Bridget gains attention for embarrassing gaffes. Having failed to receive the notice that a costume party is no longer a costume party, she wears a Playboy bunny outfit to a fancy garden party. Her outfit receives less acclaim that Arabella's romantic attire. Whereas Elizabeth defies convention—such as when she strides through the mud to aid her sister—Bridget misunderstands expectations. That gap of misunderstanding leads Bridget to flounder in her performance as a woman. But ironically, this failure reconfirms

[644] Fielding, 193.
[645] Fielding, 258.
[646] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 310.

Bridget's position as a sexual object and her need for the heteronormative system to lift her into propriety.

The irony of *Jones's Diary*, thus, is an ambivalent and sarcastic irony that is ultimately complicit with normativity, in contrast to Austen's satirical irony that quietly condemns society. In this ambivalence, *Jones's Diary* reaches further back to amatory fiction, where complicity as passive obedience is required for survival. The passive obedience of postfeminism is less about survival, however, than the comfort of the romance mode. Bridget's identification with feminism articulates postfeminism's romantic obsequiousness. Bridget moves between claiming and repudiating the feminist label dependent on the label's situational ability to attract men. She is flattered when Mark Darcy tells Bridget he has heard she is "a radical feminist and [has] an incredibly glamorous life."[647] Her response: "'Oooh,' I purred."[648] But when a friend begins critiquing dating culture, Bridget dramatically collapses at this commentary's feminist undertones. "By this time Jude and I were going, 'Shhh, shhh,' out of the corners of our mouths and sinking down into our coats. After all, there is nothing so unattractive to a man as strident feminism."[649] These opposing reactions illustrate how Bridget conceptualizes feminism in a postfeminist manner. Patriarchal acceptance and romantic possibilities are the priority. This ambivalent feminism lacks intersectionality, as does the entire novel. Feminism functions as an object for Bridget that she wields when convenient for her sexual desires. Her feminism is, consequently, a juxtapolitical tool for commodity eroticism of her cultural environment.

Bridget acquires this contradictory commodity feminism through women's culture; her trademark relatability emerges from her relationship with this intimate public. Bridget details her

[647] Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 206.
[648] Fielding, 206.
[649] Fielding, 18.

extensive preparations for a date with Daniel Cleaver. “Surely it is not normal to be revising for a date as if it were a job interview?” she ponders, conflating romance and work in a neoliberal fashion.[650] She waxes her body, looks at the newspaper, and flips through *Ultimate Sex Guide* because she believes she must shape herself into an idealized form to achieve her goal, which is a relationship with Daniel. Bridget is aware that she is taming herself. Gill and Herdieckerhoff describe how Bridget’s relationship to her body inaugurates the “unruly” chick lit singleton. Chick lit novels often portray “a body that is always already unruly and which requires constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline, and remodelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to judgments of normative femininity.”[651] Bridget’s stringent date regime is a stark contrast to the Elizabeth Bennet who appears mud-covered at the Bingley estate. Elizabeth’s disregard of propriety attracts Darcy; Bridget’s inability to adhere to idealized norms attracts her Darcy. Bridget is aware of her self-fashioning, and this awareness illustrates her authenticity.

> Wise people will say Daniel should like me just as I am, but I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture, have been traumatized by super-models and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices. I can't take the pressure. I am going to cancel and spend the evening eating doughnuts in a cardigan with egg on it.[652]

Here rests postfeminism’s radical potential, wherein an acknowledgment of neoliberalism’s ideologies generates a moment for the character to refuse them. Yet, Bridget is no Violenta and she submits to her culture unquestioningly. One genre of the romance form in women’s culture from the1990s-2000s, chick lit forecloses its radical potential before this potential is explored.

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[650] Fielding, 51.
[651] Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff, “Rewriting The Romance: New Femininities in Chick Lit?,” *Feminist Media Studies* 6, no. 4 (December 2006): 498, https://doi.org/10.1080/14680770600989947.
[652] Fielding, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 52.

Bridget inhabits and inaugurates this iteration of the romance form. She is a devoted feminine citizen in neoliberal women's culture. She is also an icon of this intimate public. Another quick Etsy foray with the search input "Bridget Jones" delivers a smattering of commodities, such as a replica of Jones's diary, and cards and t-shirt with quotes (Figure 7).[653] *Pride and Prejudice* items—again largely from the 2005 film—also come up in the search.

Feminine citizenship, we are told through this Etsy landscape and *Bridget Jones's Diary*, delivers access to the neoliberal good life. Bridget fantasizes often about wedded bliss. When still with Daniel, she writes, "Head is full of moony fantasies about living in flats with him and running along beaches together with tiny offspring in manner of Calvin Klein advert, being trendy Smug Married instead of sheepish Singleton."[654] Smug Marrieds are the term Bridget and her friends apply to most married couples, including their friends. Bridget suffers a dinner party that her Smug Married friends host. During this party, they inquire about Bridget's dating life and pointedly ask why she isn't married. Bridget takes their questions and their marital states as personal insults. "Maybe the Smug Marrieds only mix with other Smug Marrieds and don't know how to relate to individuals any more. Maybe they really do want to patronize us and make us feel like failed human beings."[655] Marriage, in Bridget's eyes, is the end-all-be-all of life. Part of this telos is related to the perceived consumer affordances of marriage. She "admir[es] the crisp sheets and many storage jars full of different kinds of pasta" that her friends have.[656] Such details are an implicit association between marriage and wealth, as well as social cache. Bridget

[653] It is important to note that these items are, like the Austen items, related to the 2001 film starring Renée Zellweger. The film, I would argue, is more popular than the book. The film has important plot changes, including a dramatic fist fight over Bridget between Daniel Cleaver and Mark Darcy, respectively played by Hugh Grant and Colin Firth who were well-known for the Austen adaptations. The subplot of Julio, explored later in this chapter, is also altered. The mother still has an affair in the film, albeit with a shopping channel host whose uppity nature idealizes Englishness. The idealization is more specific, reifying countryside versus city Englishness.
[654] Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 113.
[655] Fielding, 35.
[656] Fielding, 35.

sometimes rejects this idealization that she envies and indulges in. Her first internal response to her friends' question about her singleness is "*I don't want to end up like you, you fat, boring, Sloaney milch cow*."[657] With this bitter perspective, Bridget embraces the single life. "So glad decided to be festive Home Alone Singleton like Princess Diana."[658] These moments are, however, romanticized in a manner that recapitulates neoliberal heteronormativity. The speculative and abstract nature of capitalism begun in the eighteenth century flourished in the years between Elizabeth Bennet and Bridget Jones. By the neoliberal era, capitalist realism has set in. The seeming inescapabilty of capitalism is seen in the shifting anxieties of the marriage market. Bridget is not chasing marriage for financial security or concrete class goals like marrying into gentry or peerage. Class and wealth are still in embedded in the neoliberal marriage market, but in a more conceptual manner. The social appearances of matrimony consume Bridget. Her postfeminist world is supposed to offer her life outside of marriage: career, friends, hobbies. But all aspects of Bridget's independent life are oriented around coupledom. The moments that refine this telos are soaked in a bitter irony that implies frustrated discontent. She and her three best friends bemoan a "patronizing article in the paper by Smug Married journalist."[659] "Lonely style-obsessed individuals seek consolation in packeted comfort food of the kind their mother might have made."[660] The friends lament the denigration and the cultural orientation towards marriage. One friend complains, "Their influence affects everything from the kind of houses being built to the kind of food that stocks the supermarket shelves."[661]

[657] Fielding, 35.
[658] Fielding, 259.
[659] Fielding, 213.
[660] Fielding, 213.
[661] Fielding, 213.

Again, radical potential is seeded. But again, this potential is foreclosed repeatedly. And Bridget's friends assist in this foreclosure.

Bridget's friends are her main source of sympathetic relationality; like eighteenth-century sympathy, their sympathy is a unilateral process of suffering. Sympathy figures more obviously in *Jones* and chick lit as a process that affirms the suffering individual's experience. But the experience that sympathy affirms is more emotional rather than event based. Violenta and Elizabeth partake in sympathy when events rupture relationships, such as when Roderigo commits bigamy or Whickham and Lydia elope. Bridget and her friends demand sympathy even when nothing has happened. "I called Tom to report the hideous news that Daniel had not rung all weekend."[662] "Oh God, what's wrong with me? Why does nothing ever work out? It is because I am too fat. Toy with ringing Tom again but only called him forty-five minutes ago. Cannot face going into work."[663] Bridget myopically reads herself and her reality through women's culture. She abdicates agency to the romance mode. With the romance form providing the frame for her agency, Bridget need only fill it in with her emotions. Like an amatory heroine, Bridget's emotional reactions to her self-scripted romance narrative become her agency. Centuries later, a romantic heroine must still orient herself passively. Likewise, she requires sympathetic validation to confirm that she successfully performs affective passivity. Bridget's friends assist in this validation and sign off on her successful fulfilment of the sympathy contract.

Building upon the eighteenth-century romance form, Bridget's friends provide her with the therapeutic comfort of emotional capitalism. Eva Illouz uses this term to describe the shift in relationality and communication under capitalism. Illouz argues that "emotions have become

[662] Fielding, 62.
[663] Fielding, 157.

entities to be evaluated, inspected, discussed, bargained, quantified, and commodified."[664] Of course, I locate this commodification of emotions in the sympathy contract of the eighteenth century. Illouz's emotional capitalism connects this commodification specifically to neoliberal ideologies. Illouz writes, "[emotions] have also contributed to creating a suffering self, that is, an identity organized and defined by its psychic lacks and deficiencies, which is incorporated back into the market through incessant injunctions to self-change and self-realization."[665] Illouz specifically identifies therapy and feminism as major influences for emotional capitalism. I amend Illouz's argument to emphasize the commodity culture of neoliberalism. Likewise, I read the broader feminism to which Illouz refers as postfeminism. With these caveats, Illouz articulates the relationality I identify in the romance form in texts like *Jones's Diary*. Illouz describes how emotional capitalism displaces emotions from subjectivity and places them in public conversation as objects. She writes,

> [C]apitalism has made us Rousseauian with a vengeance not only in the sense that emotional fields of action have made identity publicly exposed and publicly narrated, not only in the sense that emotions have become instruments of social classification, but also in the sense that there are now new hierarchies of emotional well-being, understood as the capacity to achieve socially and historically situated forms of happiness and well-being.[666]

From her Rousseau reference to emotional hierarchies, Illouz again describes a process that is indebted to the eighteenth century. In Bridget Jones's time, this externalization—which is reminiscent of eighteenth-century philosophies of feeling—is much more evident in how she

[664] Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, 2013, 109, https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:101:1-201412118960.
[665] Illouz, 109.
[666] Illouz, 73.

proffers her emotions to her friends as their sole topic of conversation. With this dynamic, Bridget's friends serve the therapeutic function that Illouz describes. Her closest friends do so from their postfeminist perspectives, which allow them to serve as Bridget's reassuring counsel. They turn to each other for confirmation of their choices and reassurance of their value. This dynamic outsources individual identities into a collective space. The private emotions that Elizabeth wheedles out of Jane or that Marianne displays with a huff become a spectacle for shared dissection. And this dissection—which requires the labor of listening—confirms the speaker's suffering. The listener, like a therapist, must interact further than in a sympathetic relation of previous centuries. And more listeners are required. Friendships are more like Lydia and Kitty's co-dependence rather than Elizabeth and Jane's mutual investigations of each other's situations.

Coupled with explicit consumerist habits, emotional intimacy in *Bridget Jones's Diary* is staunchly neoliberal. With her endless self-help book recommendations, Bridget's friend Jude provides Bridget's therapeutic resources. These books are the modern cure that the doctor provides Arabella in *The Female Quixote*. But, in this neoliberal romance form, women do not require fixing so much as check-ups. *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1992) is Jude's most prominent recommendation, with references to the book made throughout Jones's narrative. Another recommendation from Jude that Bridget adopts is "a marvelous new oriental idea in this month's *Cosmopolitan* called Feng Shui, which helps you get everything you want in life."[667] Under postfeminism, the ancient Chinese practice is commodified towards the good life. "V. excited by new theory as could explain a lot," Bridget writes in her diary.[668] Bridget desires a logical system to confirm her biases, similarly to the doctor's rational conversion of Arabella.

[667] Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 222.
[668] Fielding, 222.

"Resolve to buy *Cosmo* at earliest opportunity."[669] Bridget buys the *Cosmopolitan* issue to decode the feng shui of her apartment. A feminine citizen, Bridget mediates her self-understanding through women's culture and the sympathetic intimacy of emotional capitalism.

Despite Fielding's novel emphasis on friendship, the collective dynamic of Bridget's friends reinforces individualism—the core tenet of neoliberalism. Jude's penchant for self-help books reflects how Bridget's friendship siphon structural responsibility onto the individual. When her friends are unavailable, Bridget lapses into despair.

> I hate Christmas. Everything is designed for families, romance, warmth, emotion and presents, and if you have no boyfriend, no money, your mother is going out with a missing Portuguese criminal and your friends don't want to be your friend anymore, it makes you want to emigrate to a vicious Muslim regime, where at least all the women are treated like social outcasts. Anyway, I don't care.[670]

Bridget's catastrophizing functions to confirm her sad singledom. With this confirmation, Bridget willfully acquiesces to the romance mode. As the depths of her despair are the result of her attachment to the romance form, successful embodiment of the form is the only recourse for her. In the Christmastime absence of her friends, Jones is individualized and isolated to her romance plot. Without their sympathetic confirmation, Bridget finds validation in self-pity. The loop of cruel optimism sets in. Bridget finds comfortable discomfort within this loop. Her lamentation broaches the novel's whiteness. The passing reference to "a vicious Muslim regime" is oriented within western hegemony's denigration of Muslim cultures. This broad statement taps into hierarchal suffering, which is related to the eighteenth-century construction of sympathy. Offset with this reference, Married Smugness is indelibly related to English whiteness. It also

[669] Fielding, 222.
[670] Fielding, 253.

represents the higher echelons of this whiteness. Bridget already holds an elevated socio-cultural position with her independent, urban lifestyle and blonde, white appearance. Married Smugness would deliver Bridget, at least in her mind, even more social cache and approbation. In conjunction with women's culture and societal expectations, Bridget reifies matrimony. Through this reification, Married Smugness is the nebulous object towards which she strives and through which she develops affective intimacies with others. But, deeply attached to her feminine citizenship, Bridget has projected herself through this communal object of desire so much so that she has created distance between her and her fellow citizens. This distance proliferates her striving because it further confirms her belief that a romantic union will deliver a superior intimacy. Further, this distance individualizes Bridget from fellow citizens, like her friends. With this distance, Bridget and her friends can help each other follow the terms of the sympathy contract.

The whiteness of the romance form and sympathy contract is confirmed through two other subplots that function to uplift the heroic status of Mark and, in slightly different ways, position Bridget as a neoliberal heroine. Bridget receives an assignment to interview Elena Rossini for her new TV journalism job; her last interview was a flop, making this assignment critical to establish herself in this new career. When first given this assignment, Bridget confuses Rossini for the actress Isabella Rossellini. Rossini is in fact a nanny on trial for murdering her employer whom she accuses of sexual assault and imprisonment. Bridget commits another classic Bridget gaffe when she misses Rossini's exit from the courthouse because she is buying cigarettes and candy for herself and others. Conveniently, Mark Darcy is doing the same. A successful lawyer, Mark has just won Rossini her freedom. Rossini has asked Mark to purchase

chocolates "in a foreign accent."[671] This is the sole reference to Rossini's non-Englishness, which likely influenced the "effective house arrest" to which her employer subjected her and which enabled his serial raping of Rossini.[672] But that's not the point. The point is that the trial brings together Mark and Bridget. Like amatory fiction lovers driven apart and reunited through coincidence, Mark and Bridget reconcile a significant misunderstanding: both believe the other failed to show for a first date two nights earlier. Bridget's hairdryer inadvertently precluded her from hearing Mark ring her doorbell. "Maybe you should get a quieter hair dryer or begin your *toilette* a little earlier,'" Mark tells her while laughing.[673] Days earlier, Mark had attempted to explain his feelings to Bridget. "'Bridget, all the other girls I know are so lacquered over. I don't know anyone else who would fasten a bunny tail to their pants or …'"[674] Unlike his namesake, Mark struggles for words. Mark, however, evidently fancies Bridget because she is in excess of normative expectations; yet Bridget incessantly strives to whittle herself down to fit those expectations. From this contradiction emerges Bridget's relatability with her reader and allure for Mark Darcy. In the socio-cultural scheme of Bridget's world, Mark reigns as a successful and attractive man; Bridget's position is tenuous, in comparison. This dynamic recreates the imbalance of eighteenth-century romances, wherein our heroine's financial or class status is inferior. Yet, Bridget's virtues do not raise her status. Rather, her affective fixation on the good life and her inability to achieve the good life without assistance develop her into a desirable woman. She is a victim of her emotions and of her neoliberal, *Cosmopolitan* culture. Her diary narrativizes her victimhood and erases the narratorial skepticism and empiricism of the

[671] Fielding, 210.
[672] Fielding, 210.
[673] Fielding, 211.
[674] Fielding, 207.

eighteenth-century romance form. Mark's interest in Bridget remains somewhat baffling—until transposed onto the sympathy contract.

Bridget's emotional self-narrativizing and her public gaffes establish her as the suffering subject, and Mark heeds her call with erotic desire that, like the sympathy of her friends, confirms both Mark and Bridget's positionality within heteronormativity. Mark secures Bridget the only television interview with Rossini after her exculpation. This exchange links the pair's professional and romantic pursuits because his erotic sympathy brings him to leverage his professional success for Bridget's fledgling career. Through Bridget's suffering, the stern and distant Mark becomes the romantic hero. This suffering is affective, unlike the violence and insecurities of eighteenth-century heroines. Unlike Mr. Darcy, Mark does not evolve or undergo much introspection. He is simply recast through the sympathy contract of Bridget's postfeminism romance form. This event updates the rescue subplot of amatory fiction into the neoliberal schema of commodity eroticism through enacting erotic sympathy within the professional realm.

The novel's romantic climax depends on another foreign character and rescue subplot that propels Mark into herodom and delivers a final postfeminist critique and capitulation. This subplot rewrites the Lydia and Wickham crisis through Bridget's mother, Pam. It begins with Pam reclaiming her agency after years of housewifery.

> "Darling, it's merely a question of realizing, when your father retired, that I had spent thirty-five years without a break running his home and bringing up his children—"
>
> "Jamie and I are your children too," I interjected, hurt.
>
> "—and that as far as he was concerned his lifetime's work was over and mine was

> still carrying on, which is exactly how I used to feel when you were little and it got to the weekends. You only get one life. I've just made a decision to change things a bit and spend what's left of mine looking after me for a change."[675]

Pam begins a new career as a TV presenter. Through Pam's connections, Bridget lands her TV job. The mother's plot delivers the novel's subversive edge by challenging the heteronormative assumption of post-marital bliss. Whereas *Pride and Prejudice* implies the Bennet parent's unhappiness, Pam names this discontent and acts on it. Bridget tries to support her mother. "I was thinking it all over and trying, as a feminist, to see Mum's point of view."[676] And yet, the novel taints the mother's fight for freedom. Pam meets Julio while in Portugal and separates from her husband to take up with Julio. Julio's Portuguese nationality defines his character. "My mother is sleeping with a Portuguese," Bridget writes.[677] Julio enacts a timeshare scam that robs Bridget's parents and friends—including Mark Darcy's parents—of their savings. The scam threatens the Jones family home, bringing the plot a degree closer to Austen's. Instead of English inheritance laws, international fraud and adultery are the legal issues at hand. Julio absconds to Portugal, where he becomes "a missing Portuguese criminal," in Bridget's words.[678] Defined through his foreignness, criminality, and adultery, Julio aggrandizes Englishness by contrast. The elevation of Englishness is furthered in the subplot's resolution. Like his namesake, Mark Darcy resolves the situation. He tracks down Julio and Bridget's mother in Portugal and only reappears in the narrative the help the police apprehend Julio back in England. Bridget's mother and Julio remain affectionate as the police arrest Julio. With Pam, Fielding creates a subversive portrayal of heteronormative matrimony and critiques matrimony as the telos for women's lives.

[675] Fielding, 47.
[676] Fielding, 47.
[677] Fielding, 157.
[678] Fielding, 253.

Fielding also develops a matrilineal allegiance to romantic excess, akin to Arabella and her mother or Lydia and Mrs. Bennet. The novel's final moments pivot on Bridget's inherited kinship with the romance form. Watching Julio and her mother embrace as the police arrest Julio, Bridget narrates, "I stared at the hideous scene, feeling as though my whole world was collapsing around my ears."[679] Enter the novel's proper English suitor. Mark Darcy provides an emotional salve for the chaotic scene of marital distress. "Then I felt a strong hand on my arm."[680] Mark announces he and Bridget are leaving for their private Christmas celebration. During this scene, Mark explains how he tracked down Julio—again confirming his involvement in resolving Bridget's familial crisis—and the pair shift quickly to physical intimacy. This shift and the novel's happy ending pivots on language that links Pam to her daughter's romantic bliss. Pam repeatedly tells Bridget to say "pardon?" instead of "what?" Mark is aware of Pam's corrective refrain and references his heroic Christmas time chat with Bridget. Bridget delivers it back to Mark when she struggles to explain her evolving attraction to him. "I thought you thought I was the most frightful stiff," Mark says to Bridget.[681]

> "Well, I did, a bit," [Bridget] said, "But . . . "
>
> "But what. . . ?"
>
> "Don't you mean but pardon?" Then he took the champagne glass out of my hand, kissed me, and said, "Right, Bridget Jones, I'm going to give you pardon for."[682]

At which point, Mark carries her off to his bed in one final heroic moment. The next day, Bridget declares,

[679] Fielding, 265.
[680] Fielding, 265.
[681] Fielding, 267.
[682] Fielding, 267.

> Have finally realized the secret of happiness with men, and it is with deep regret, rage and an overwhelming sense of defeat that I have to put it in the words of an adulteress, criminal's accomplice and G-list celebrity: “Don't say 'what,' say 'pardon,' darling, and do as your mother tells you.” [683]

With this culmination, Bridget happily accepts the matrimonial path her mother planned for her. Quite literally, as Bridget’s mother tried to set up at the beginning of the year, not in small part because of his wealth. Bridget’s hesitancies towards this heteronormative future have arisen only when the path seems unachievable for her; regardless, Bridget’s narrative has always centered on this journey. As confirmation that she has never deviated, the novel ends as it began: a consideration of her New Year’s resolutions. Alongside the number of cigarettes smoked and calories consumed over the year, Bridget adds a tally of “*Nice boyfriends 1*.”[684] She commends herself: “An *excellent* year's progress.”[685]

With *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, Helen Fielding heralded the new romance form genre of chick lit. Despite chick lit’s dependency on the modern wonders of miniskirts and working women, the chick lit genre parallels period adaptations of Austen, like *Sense and Sensibility*. The affective ambivalence of postfeminist women’s culture infuses neoliberal individualism and consumerism into period and modern Austen adaptations alike, from BBC’s *Pride and Prejudice* to *Clueless*. The foundational affective dynamics of the eighteenth-century form continue to structure the girl power era romance form. Heroines contest the limits of feminine propriety with their unruly desires, generating a personal and cultural confrontation that plays out in a romantic pursuit. In this confrontation, heroine and reader enter a playfully escapist realm that indulges in

[683] Fielding, 267.
[684] Fielding, 271.
[685] Fielding, 271.

aesthetic excess. Under the auspice of postfeminism, the neoliberal romance form ironizes this journey and uses irony to mediate narrative tension. Neoliberal romance holds fast to this irony, albeit without the satirical edge of Haywood or Austen. Irony, largely presented through the heroine's self-awareness of her feminine citizenship, enables the heroine to submit to cultural expectations and maintain her excesses. She can keep her feminine excess because, in accordance with postfeminist ambivalence, they allow her to resist and submit simultaneously. Leaning comfortably on the sympathies of her friends, the heroine trades in her too muchness—too much weight, too much leg hair, too much career ambition, too much shopping debt, too much social embarrassment—for a passive victimhood that requires the rescue of her suitor. The eighteenth-century form used regulated violence from outside sources to reformulate these excesses; but, as a neoliberal feminine citizen, the heroine commits the harm against herself. She finds passive obedience in postfeminism. Her negative inner dialogue and self-care regime whittle her down just enough that she becomes comedically relatable and endearing to her suitor. Through this trajectory, the romance form keeps its feminine citizens striving because, as in the eighteenth century, the heroine changes the presentation of ideal femininity to appear progressive. But, as ever, this allowance of excessive indulgence and proximity to the ideal femininity is gatekept through whiteness.

I consider the romance form's exclusion in my final chapter through contrasting two late neoliberal novels featuring a Black Jamaican-English and a white English heroine. In their late 2010s settings, these heroines progress through romance amid a changing media landscape that affects socio-economic pathways for women, akin to the growth of publishing industry from which amatory fiction emerged 200 years earlier. In the intervening years between these eras, the romance form's racialization has accumulated such its relationship to whiteness is conspicuous.

Chapter 5: Girlboss, Volume 2; or, The Neoliberal Romance Heroine Loses the Plot

"The thing about me is, I am an empath," Mary Musgrove states when explaining why caring for her children is burdensome.[686] Not in Austen's *Persuasion*, but in Netflix's universally panned 2022 adaptation. A review from the publisher Penguin critiques how Anne Elliot speaks "in the style of the 'messy women' of millennial pop culture."[687] The mashing of contemporary dialogue and film style onto Austen was the source of most criticisms, while the color-blind casting received ire from some.[688] Reviewers read *Persuasion*'s failings against the more successful contemporary influences on the film. Justin Chang for the *LA Times* contrasted the film's weaknesses against the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and Phoebe Waller-Bridge's hit show *Fleabag* (2016), which follows a woman struggling to manage her mental health.[689] The headline of Helen Lewis's *Atlantic* review summarizes the film's failures: "Jane Austen's *Persuasion* Meets the Girlboss Era."[690]

In the decades following the publication and adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, neoliberal culture–and its interpretations of eighteenth-century romances–shifted in such a way to generate the girlboss figure. After Jones's girl power moment, feminism leaves centerstage until the mid-2010s, when popular celebrities began to claim the label of feminist. Celebrity feminism and start-up culture gave birth to the girlboss.[691] The girlboss rhetoric seemingly

[686] *Persuasion* (Netflix, 2022).
[687] "How Netflix's Persuasion Talks over Jane Austen's Novel," Penguin, July 6, 2022, https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2022/07/persuasion-netflix-austen-book-review/.
[688] Amanda-Rae Prescott, "Persuasion Discourse Has Revealed Racism in Jane Austen Fandom," Den of Geek, July 17, 2022, https://www.denofgeek.com/movies/persuasion-discourse-has-revealed-racism-in-jane-austen-fandom/.
[689] Justin Chang, "Review: Netflix's Jane Austen Adaptation 'Persuasion' Is a Dreadful Film, Never to Be Borne," Los Angeles Times, July 13, 2022, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2022-07-13/persuasion-review-netflix-dakota-johnson-jane-austen.
[690] Lewis, "Jane Austen's 'Persuasion' Meets the Girlboss Era."
[691] A historically specific moment in white feminism, the term "girlboss" originates with Sophia Amoruso, who coined the term in tandem with her successful e-commerce brand Nasty Gal. In 2014, Amoruso published her

reclaimed feminism for the young millennial generation after popular culture had rejected feminism as a bad word. A successful and stylish entrepreneur, the girlboss proclaims that you can have it all while doing good. Her trendy companies "disrupt" the marketplace with products marketed for all women. Typically white, beautiful, and well-connected, the girlboss promised inclusivity and equity but failed to deliver because her capitalist interests were at odds with her feminist values. With these complicities, the girlboss wears the postfeminist sensibility. In the girlboss era "power and money became measures of equality, and rising to power in a capitalist system turned into an empowering feminist victory," Alex Abad-Santos writes.[692] "[The girlboss] was a way of framing financial success and consumerism as goodness."[693] She was also representative of the commodification of self that occurred in the late 2010s in conjunction with social media. Social media eroded the separation of work and life for many, as sharing one's personal life blossomed into a viable career through social media. Part of the larger tech and start-up boom, social media and the merging of personal and professional was integral to the girlboss' rise. Riding the coattails of bloated start-up funding and the entrepreneurship of new media, the girlboss rhetoric packaged neoliberal capitalism as an empowering and ethical paradigm for women. Sentimentalism is at the heart of the girlboss: she is doing good for others through feeling good herself. The positive embrace of femininity within girlboss imagery assists in this feel-good construction. The girlboss's morality arises from her corporate attack on the patriarchy and her feminine business, many of which fell under the increasingly broad category of "self-care." Self-care, the girlboss business model espoused, was critical for transforming one's self into an ethical citizen. Self-care was also an exploitable business sector that the

memoir *#Girlboss*; she followed it up with the 2017 *The Girlboss Workbook: An Interactive Journal for Winning at Life* and in the same year Netflix adapted her memoir into a show.

[692] Abad-Santos, "Girlboss Ended Not with a Bang, but a Meme."

[693] Abad-Santos.

girlboss heavily monetized. Mental health and personal development could be purchased, thanks to the girlboss.

It is within this 2010s postfeminist landscape of incessant self-commoditizing and wellness consumerism that Candice Carty-Williams's *Queenie* and Dolly Alderton's *Ghosts* are published. Both novels were likened to *Bridget Jones's Diary* in their marketing and reviews because they followed young women in London navigating romantic and professional dramas, with a narratorial voice that balanced self-deprecation and sincerity. Alderton's 2020 novel features a blurb that describes it as "a smart, sexy, laugh-out-loud romantic comedy."[694] Reviews agree with this depiction of *Ghosts*, solidifying its status as a work of commercial fiction that engages with modern concerns as much as it perpetuates western normativity. "Comfortable tropes are mixed with darker themes in a zeitgeisty comic novel about thirtysomething life," reads Michael Donkor's review in *The Guardian*.[695] India Lewis for *The Arts Desk* describes the novel as "feminism lite."[696] "There's something simultaneously cringey and also addictive about Dolly Alderton's prose," Lewis writes.[697] *Queenie*'s marketing similarly invoked the romantic comedy genre, but used this invocation as an entry point to the 2018 novel's appeal rather than its entire offering. "*Bridget Jones's Diary* meets *Americanah* in this disarmingly honest, boldly political, and truly inclusive novel that will speak to anyone who has gone looking for love and found something very different in its place."[698] The first review on the book cover, from Kirkus Reviews, reads, "A black Bridget Jones, perfectly of the moment."[699]

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[694] Dolly Alderton, *Ghosts* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021).
[695] Michael Donkor, "Ghosts by Dolly Alderton Review – a Sharp-Eyed Debut," *The Guardian*, October 21, 2020, sec. Books, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/oct/21/ghosts-by-dolly-alderton-review-a-sharp-eyed-debut.
[696] India Lewis, "Dolly Alderton: Ghosts Review - a Love Story beyond Romance," October 13, 2020, https://theartsdesk.com/books/dolly-alderton-ghosts-review-love-story-beyond-romance.
[697] Lewis.
[698] Candice Carty-Williams, *Queenie*, First Scout Press hardcover edition (New York: Scout Press, 2019).
[699] Carty-Williams.

Although *Queenie* and *Ghosts* feature chick lit tropes that *Bridget Jones's Diary* inaugurated, these texts are not classified as such–mainly because the chick lit nomenclature grew stale in the late 2000s and fractured into the categories of contemporary romance, contemporary women's fiction, and new adult. *Queenie* and *Ghosts* exist across these categories in their updates of the formal and thematic conventions in *Jones's Diary*. Their changes to chick lit reveal shifts in neoliberal culture and illuminate shifts and continuities with eighteenth-century romances.

Neither novel ends in a romantic union—a girlboss is too busy investing in herself to chase after a man. Instead, both *Queenie* and *Ghosts* culminate in a gathering of friends and family. The heroines undergo radically different journeys to arrive at this end due to the radically different ways in which their shared London setting sees them. Twenty-something Queenie Jenkins struggles with her mental health in the wake of a break-up and miscarriage; further affecting Queenie's pursuit of romance and happiness is the racial discrimination and violence she constantly endures as a Black woman born in London. Her Jamaican family grounds her sense of belonging and places her at odds with the ideologies of whiteness permeating her professional and social worlds. Queenie ultimately turns to therapy to confront the trauma of misogynoir,[700] cultural tensions, and childhood abuse from her mother's Jamaican boyfriend.

[700] Moya Bailey, who coined this portmanteau, writes that "Misogynoir describes the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization." Misogynoir, according to Bailey, disseminates into American culture through stereotyped media representations and subsequently infiltrates the daily lived experiences of Black women. "Misogynoir is deployed because of social beliefs about Black women, and those of us who are read as Black women—despite our self-identification—get caught in the crosshairs," she writes. Though Bailey writes to American history and culture, her term nonetheless applies to Queenie's experiences, despite Britain's different conceptualization of race stemming partially through its physical distance from chattel slavery and its stronger attachments to class. In *Queenie*, misogynoir parallels the roving boundaries of feminine excess, albeit nuanced through racialization. Queenie's Black body must be malleable in order to conform to whiteness and confirms its superiority. Moya Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, Intersections Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Genders and Sexualities (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 16, 35.

Ghosts's Nina Dean dives back into the dating pool in her mid-thirties, as social pressures of marriage and motherhood bear down on her. A blonde, white woman born in London, Nina indulges her heteronormative fantasies with Max, her new boyfriend that ghosts (disappears with no word) her twice. Balancing her career and her father's declining health, Nina tries to separate her personal desires from cultural expectations.

Rife with cultural awareness, these two novels seem like strident rejections of the romance form, as do other media that frontload singleness like *Fleabag*. To varying degrees, *Queenie* and *Ghosts* do lose the romance plot. These novels do not throw out the romance form, though. Rather, in keeping with their neoliberal culture and girlboss feminism, the novels illustrates a new iteration of the romance form. The novels confront the romance form with different objectives. *Queenie*, especially when offset by *Ghosts*, articulates the racial prejudice that the romance form has long hidden away in its playfulness. A technology of racial capitalism, the romance form sells the capitalist promise of happiness to feminine individuals, who remain attached through the form's affective comforts of erotic play and communal belonging. Against *Queenie*, *Ghosts* illustrates the romance form's ongoing idealization of a virtuous femininity. Passive obedience, satire, sympathy, skepticism. By now, the eighteenth century's romantic interests have unraveled, and their threads restitched. Victimhood, passivity, and whiteness (or, "Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss" if you're shopping on Etsy) are the defining features of the neoliberal feminine citizen, who remains within the romance mode even without a man on the horizon.

Under writ by racial capitalism, socio-cultural sympathy remains the demonstrative mark of approval that an individual is successfully leveraging white femininity's affective constellation. As always, these lines are never clearly demarcated because whiteness defies clear

definition. A racially white woman can fail at white femininity because other figures can leverage their whiteness against her in their favor. This dynamic can take the form of passive aggression, to which Nina's narration recurs in *Ghosts* to mark herself as exceptional against her white friends. In a more racially obvious display, Queenie is the recipient of a white woman's passive aggression after the woman's child splashes water on Queenie. Passive aggression is a modern, racialized mode of passive obedience that asserts a citizen's allegiance to hegemonic hierarchies.[701] In late-stage capitalism, postfeminist ambivalence still politicizes passivity through whiteness in a similar manner to passive aggression. The accessibility of choice that postfeminism offers is explored in both novels, with Queenie reckoning with her lack of choice against Nina's indulgence in ambivalence.

Conscripted to abjection, Queenie is barred from the heroine's journey that enacts a playful reframing of personal desire into cultural demands, which Nina is granted. Excluded from the sympathy contract and the promise of the good life, Queenie develops an alternative approach to sympathy. Queenie detaches from the romance mode through a form of sympathy that develops self-introspection through socio-cultural setting. Simultaneous to sympathizing with herself, Queenie aggrandizes her sympathy toward her family and community. Thus, Queenie renders sympathy a dialectic between inner selves and broader communities, rather than a unilateral occurrence. In this onus on the self, Queenie works within neoliberalism and its individualism. *Ghosts* similarly emphasizes the self—Nina's introspections and embrace of the single life are the narrative's radical potential. But this subversion is within the terms of neoliberal white femininity. The novel's social critiques are postfeminist, and Nina accordingly embodies white femininity as a juxtapolitical structuring of identity. Avoiding direct

[701] Passive aggression is not exclusive to race. Indeed, Nina's deployment involves gender. Likewise, class and education are common topics for passive aggression.

weaponization of racial hierarchization, Nina skirts white feminism but illustrates its affective orientations. Comfortable within her white femininity, Nina's reconciles her personal divergences with heteronormativity through nostalgia and postfeminist ambivalence. Overlapping with *Queenie* in many aspects, *Ghosts* illustrates how the romance form adjusts the terms of acceptable excess to project progress while retaining racial exclusion.

The digital marriage market

Leveraging the neoliberal romance form's emphasis on relatability, *Queenie* opens with a highly visceral scene that immediately sutures together personal and cultural phenomena through Queenie's sensory experiences. The first line of the novel is a text Queenie sends reading "In the stirrups now."[702] Any confusion the reader has with this phrase is clarified quickly–especially for those familiar with the experience of a pelvic exam. Queenie, staring at the ceiling, describes how her gynecologist, "with no further warning[,] inserted what felt like the world's least ergonomic dildo into me and moved it around like a joystick."[703] The stilted dialogue and cold hand of the doctor further embed the reader in a scene that is both incredibly intimate but widely experienced. "I was twenty-five; I wasn't going to have a baby. Obviously. But it would have been nice to have the choice."[704] Queenie places pregnancy in the modern context of liberal societies, which proclaim to support women's agency over their bodies and lives but undermine this agency through intense legal and cultural regulation. Eighteenth-century romances and chick lit à la *Jones* achieve realism in different approaches to the body and interiority. *Queenie* does not read bodies with an undercutting irony as *Jones* does; nor does *Queenie* read appearance and

[702] Carty-Williams, *Queenie*, 1.
[703] Carty-Williams, 1.
[704] Carty-Williams, 11.

bodily movements as evidence of virtue. Of the books analyzed here Queenie's world is most akin to *Clarissa* insofar as physical and mental violations affect the gendered body and consequently a woman's ability to claim her personhood. However, *Clarissa* favors the emotional rather than sensory experiences in depicting this dynamic, whereas Queenie ties together sensory and emotional experiences. Queenie suffers continual violations–largely at the hands of white men–and does not shirk from describing the emotional and mental fallout. This particular physical incursion of the gynecologist becomes an internal incursion as Queenie discovers she has suffered a miscarriage, despite having an IUD. The doctors know before Queenie that she was pregnant, and that her pregnancy has ended–her body is only partially in her control.

This opening scene establishes the instability of Queenie's life. The media en res style introduces chaos and overlays this confusion onto the bodily discomfort of a pelvic exam. The reader is caught unaware like Queenie, who learns of her pregnancy and miscarriage in one fell swoop. The reader also contends with the confusion of whom Queenie is texting. Beginning en media res, Queenie does not explicitly tell the reader; rather, memories of Tom, the emptiness of their flat, unanswered texts, and finally a discussion with her friend confirm for the reader that the pair are no longer together. This unfolding also confirms another arena in which Queenie is not in control. Her attachment to her former partner, and her attachment to the life he promised, orients Queenie's interiority for much of the novel. She longs for Tom to return, and is "beginning to worry that if things didn't go back to normal soon, [her] mind would go to places that [she] wouldn't be able to retrieve it from."[705] The romance form begins with a woman's position in flux, whether because a father demands that our heroine marry or a new family

[705] Carty-Williams, 93.

marriage displaces our heroines. Typically, the romance form opens with optimism towards the heroine's changing situation. Entailment is an existing issue for the Bennet sisters, yet readers enter their story when a new escape route appears through Bingley's arrival. Queenie's story begins at the ending. "You're the one who thought she found her white savior," Queenie's aunt Maggie tells her at the gynecologists.[706] This early comment signals Queenie's racial position and the whiteness of the life she envisioned with Tom. Queenie, the novel's opening informs us, is a failed heroine; she has lost her hero. Queenie has failed at womanhood not only through this break-up but also through her body. She has miscarried. Her ability to be a successful wife–defined by heteronormative reproduction–is under question through this miscarriage. Her declining mental health further confirms her body's inability to conform to normative expectations.

The stress of her break-up and the pain of her miscarriage, as well as other extant personal dynamics, manifest in anxiety. This anxiety tells Queenie she has failed to achieve normalcy, and she sees her romantic life as the source of her failure. "Three years from now and I was meant to have been getting married. I was meant to be stable, and loved, and … I looked back down, and the words on the page began to blue."[707] The physical symptoms of Queenie's miscarriage roll into her physical symptoms of anxiety, thus linking her body and the socio-cultural messaging that attacks her internally. Her miscarriage cramps become stomach pains of nausea, breathlessness, blurred vision, intrusive thoughts–all symptoms of anxiety attacks.

Queenie's narration often descends into her body, such that her body frequently mediates personal feelings and socio-cultural ideologies. From the smells of Brixton market to an oncoming panic attack, Queenie's sensory descriptions create a textured experience for the

[706] Carty-Williams, 10.
[707] Carty-Williams, 264.

reader that is reminiscent of amatory fiction's material eroticism; yet whereas the amatory body was allegorical in its exaggerations, Queenie's embodiment draws attention to her socio-political setting. She reads her body differently from the heroines of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Ghosts*. Queenie is so often dissociated from her body and highly aware of how others read her as to become an excellent narrator of her physical self. This familiarity with her body lends strength toward the political bents of *Queenie*, especially in terms of how the novel confronts the stereotyping of Black women as fungible excess. At the gynecologist, Queenie's aunt Maggie tells her how "they used to put implants and IUDs in black women without us knowing," and relays a story of a family friend who discovered this had happened.[708] Maggie tells Queenie she should not have an IUD "politically as *well* as physically."[709] Queenie inherits racial violence rather than the romance mode that she longs to embody.

In contrast to the invasive and pessimistic opening of *Queenie*, *Ghosts* begins with Nina comfortably enjoying her state of affairs. Well, her lack of affairs. *Ghosts* opens with Nina happily living in a romantic and sexual drought. Nina's singleness is more Elizabeth Bennet than Bridget Jones, as Nina is content in her current life and her desire for romance feels more closely akin to a desire for connection. But, like Bridget and earlier heroines, Nina struggles to disentangle her personal yearnings from how white heteronormativity has oriented those yearnings. The novel begins with Nina having been "inactively single," after ending a long-term relationship with her college beau who remains her close friend.[710] Two years of singledom later, and Nina is celebrating her thirty-second birthday feeling "unusually and perfectly content."[711] Contentedness describes the life Nina has created for herself. Older and more professionally

[708] Carty-Williams, 9.
[709] Carty-Williams, 10.
[710] Alderton, *Ghosts*, 11.
[711] Alderton, 12.

secure than Queenie, Nina has recently purchased an apartment in London. The one-bedroom apartment is "the actualization of this once-impossible dream."[712] While working multiple jobs, Nina established herself as a food writer and her book deals have enabled her to afford this dream. Within these first pages, Nina's career, home, and relationships are established as stable. Her relationship to her body is also stable, in its consistent ambivalence. To prepare for her birthday celebration, Nina dips into nostalgia. Blasting a playlist made in her early twenties, Nina undergoes "the same tireless rituals of feminization she had been following for fifteen years: wash hair, dry it upside down and try to increase its volume by ten per cent, pluck upper lip, two layers of mascara, second drink, walk into two spritzes of perfume."[713] Notably, Nina has renamed the soundtrack for her evenings out from "Pre-Lash" to "Good Times" so as "to mark a move away from reckless, bodily abandoned and towards mindful, considered pleasure."[714] No longer having drunken nights out like Queenie, Nina nonetheless brings the touchstones of that era into her present. This ironic attachment to her youth is extended to how she regards her body. After describing the benefits of having fringe bangs that hide her incoming wrinkles, Nina describes how her "grooming took up far too much time and was a constant source of feminist guilt."[715] Her recourse to this guilt is to linger within it. "Sometimes, when I felt despondent, I liked to calculate how many minutes of my remaining life I would spend removing upper lip hair if I lived until I was eighty-five and think about how many languages I could have learnt in that time."[716] Similar to Bridget Jones, Nina has a fraught relationship with women's culture that she weaponizes against herself. This negative inner dialogue prolongs the

[712] Alderton, 5.
[713] Alderton, 6.
[714] Alderton, 6.
[715] Alderton, 6.
[716] Alderton, 6.

attachment. “I didn’t wear a bra, simply to show off that I don’t have to wear a bra, which is a paltry consolation for having such small breasts. But I didn’t mind any more–I had become mostly indifferent to my body.”[717] A hint of passive aggression is present in how Nina dresses herself. She is not displaying her breasts for men, who are generally unfamiliar with the actual purposes of a bra. Women, however, are. And other women, thus, would know that Nina does not require one—a literal load off her back that comes with other affordances known to women. Despite this attention to her body—including her recent hair dyeing history—Nina claims indifference. Nina begins her narrative mired in the ambivalence of postfeminism. A woman’s body was central to the eighteenth-century romance form, especially in amatory fiction which located the romantic tension of personal desire and cultural acquiescence in the body. Sentimental romance likewise saw the physical body as a signal of virtue, and further aligned amatory fiction’s luxurious materialism with mercantilist growth. In domestic fictions, the body remains an important site for romantic unions and continues to serve as metonyms of virtue, but with greater emphasis placed on how individuals use their bodies to interact with their environments. Elizabeth Bennet’s “fine eyes” are, according to Darcy, “brightened by the exercise” of her traipsing through the mud.[718] In the neoliberal era, whether in chick lit or contemporary women’s fiction, ambivalence over one’s body likewise signals virtue. But, this virtue is, like Nina’s bra comment, more directly aimed at feminine citizens. A neoliberal heroine must be virtuous within the terms of postfeminist relatability. Her relatability opens her up to sympathy from some of her fellow citizens, and envy from others that contributes to the fiction of ideal femininity. These intra-intimate public dynamics are largely concocted through the feminine citizen’s striving for the good life. Erotic desirability is necessary to reach the good life,

[717] Alderton, 6–7.
[718] Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 60, 67.

because the good life is predicated on heteronormative attraction. Nina's and Bridget's feminine rituals aim toward achieving this desirability—summative evidence of how the postfeminist romance form sees feminine desire through the male gaze. Nina illustrates the continuing commodification of eroticism through her costly—in terms of time and money—preparations. Post-Bridget Jones, this commodification is intensified through social media and online dating apps.

Both Nina and Queenie turn to online dating apps with divergent experiences that speak to digital media's perpetuation of racialization, as well as the romance form's racial complicities. Sentences after declaring herself "unusually and perfectly content," Nina downloads Linx, a fictional dating app modeled on Tinder and Hinge.[719] The following paragraph finds Nina creating a dating app profile. On a night out, Queenie pines after Tom enough that her work friend Darcy—named after Mr. Darcy—corrals some other friends into making an account for Queenie on the non-fictional OkCupid. Queenie is bombarded with highly sexual messages from men such as "Chocolate girl ;)" and "Some of my favorite porn is BBW."[720] She goes out with one man, who promptly informs her that his "last girlfriend was black" and that she "was crazy."[721] A later OkCupid man informs Queenie that reverse racism exists and dismisses her as "a Black Lives Matter girl." [722] She ends their evening by telling him, "It must be nice to be so detached from a life that someone like me actually has to live."[723] This statement encompasses the shortcomings of sympathy across the romance novel: only familiar with another's suffering

[719] Alderton, *Ghosts*, 12.
[720] Carty-Williams, *Queenie*, 51.
[721] Carty-Williams, 63.
[722] Carty-Williams, 301.
[723] Carty-Williams, 302.

through momentary proximity and aligned with hegemonic whiteness, the listener is distantly sympathetic in a manner that reaffirms hierarchies of whiteness on an affective level.

Neither Queenie nor Nina has a truly enjoyable time with online dating, but Nina's experience is more positive. "For the first few days, I was totally enamored with Linx."[724] Dating apps present a user with a plethora of options that are seemingly endless, at least in a major city like London. Nina learns that "the apps initially hook you in [] by offering up their best produce to new users."[725] Dating app algorithms favor new users and users of certain demographics, like Nina. Matching with a bevy of men, Nina felt like she'd "cheated the system of romance."[726] The app makes her the main character of her life. And yet, *everyone* is having the same experience–to a certain degree. Save for the odd message, Nina's conversations are typically "stilted chit-chat as insubstantial and fleeting as a summer breeze."[727] This description positions Nina as exceptional; she is above the banality that men deliver her. And she is above the dehumanizing treatment that Queenie receives. The algorithms behind dating apps and the people behind the profiles both emerge from the world of racial capitalism. So, while Black women are cast into the commodified world of dating, Nina is a much more valuable commodity. Nina undergoes psychic violence in her dating plot—the debacle of Max leaves her a victim of her once empowering foray into digital dating. Violence in *Queenie* is much more pervasive, on a psychic and physical level resulting from her intersecting identities as a Black woman from a working-class Jamaican family.

Hegemonic whiteness decides for Queenie that she embodies the Jezebel and the Sapphire, the stereotypes of the hypersexual and exotic Black woman and the angry Black

[724] Alderton, *Ghosts*, 28.
[725] Alderton, 29.
[726] Alderton, 29.
[727] Alderton, 29.

woman. As nothing more than a stereotype, Queenie is a fungible object, always already exceeding the bounds of feminine citizenship. In a flashback, Queenie plays the game *Clue* with her then partner Tom and his family. Guessing the game's murdered, Tom's uncle states, "Was it the n***** in the pantry?"[728] Stunned, Queenie asks, "What did you say?" to which the uncle dismisses her.[729] "You're not going to take that seriously, are you?"[730] Tom remains quiet, until Queenie leaves the room and accidentally ruins a birthday cake. "Look what you've done!," he exclaims, likewise framing Queenie as the instigator of discord.[731] He tells Queenie, "I know that in your family everyone is loud and you solve problems by shouting about them, but my family is different!"[732] Queenie disrupts the comfort of familial acquiescence because she exceeds a different family's understanding of propriety beyond the point of repair. "It's constant with you. It's too much," Tom tells her.[733] "You're too much, Queenie."[734] Arabella, Bridget, and Elizabeth are all too much, but redeemably so. Queenie yells at Tom, "I hope your next girlfriend is white, Tom. That way she won't be too fucking much for you."[735] This is not the end of their relationship. But, when the end does come, Tom does immediately start dating a white woman. Because Queenie is activated through racist discourse, the underlying problem is Queenie's identity. A figure like Violenta could reclaim her virtue through violence because Violenta acts in the name of preserving matrimony; Queenie's agency–in terms of her self-expression–is verboten because it disrupts race hierarchies.

[728] Carty-Williams, *Queenie*, 38.
[729] Carty-Williams, 38.
[730] Carty-Williams, 38.
[731] Carty-Williams, 38.
[732] Carty-Williams, 39.
[733] Carty-Williams, 40.
[734] Carty-Williams, 40.
[735] Carty-Williams, 40.

In addition to her inhibited voice, Queenie is expected to hide *and* grant access to her body; the politics of respectability demand the former in public spaces, while the sexualization of Black women demands the latter. On the suggestion of her therapist, Queenie goes to a local swimming pool where the whiteness of the space makes her racialization affectively palpable. Queenie enters the swimming area burdened with body shame–a trope not unfamiliar to the neoliberal romance narrative, as seen in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. For Queenie, this body shame is racialized: the changing room "was full of women of varying shapes and sizes, but—as with work, parties, university, *anywhere*—I saw nobody like me. Nobody black. You wouldn't know I was round the corner from Brixton."[736] Brixton's gentrification is a continual refrain for Queenie, which contextualizes her socio-economic experiences. Queenie overhears a white woman talking about how she is eager to sell her second apartment in Brixton because she and her partner "just *can't* be dealing with these tenants anymore!"[737] The woman's young child comes up to Queenie and drips water over her. Queenie repeatedly asks the woman to have her child apologize, and the woman repeatedly ignores her until she passive aggressively declares to her friend, "I think we'd better go, Stella, I'm not going to be *attacked* at my local pool!"[738] Like its passive obedience, passive aggression operates on two levels to obscure intentions. Passive aggression reads as harmless on its initial linguistic level. But lurking underneath is an undercurrent of direct aggression, created through affect, audience, and context. Passive aggression is a hallmark of white femininity used to claim proximity to whiteness. At the pool, the white woman talks around Queenie, thus deeming Queenie unworthy of conversation; she also discursively categorizes Queenie as violent and thus assigns her the identity of angry Black woman–a threat

[736] Carty-Williams, 254.
[737] Carty-Williams, 255.
[738] Carty-Williams, 256.

to whiteness that the woman calls out to assert her own whiteness. This interaction sets off Queenie's anxiety, and she flees the pool. Queenie sought refuge at the swimming pool. But, she is not allowed refuge because the pool serves a resting point for white comfort. Queenie's body is an insult to whiteness for which whiteness finds her responsible; as such, Queenie must remove herself from white spaces. At least, spaces of white femininity because white men often demand Queenie relinquish her body in a different way to their sexual pleasure.

Men of different backgrounds flatten Queenie through misogynoir, enabling them to override Queenie's humanity and sidestep consent. She acquiesces to their dehumanization for various reasons: to confirm her negative self-image, to distract herself from her feelings and anxiety, to end quickly the harassment. Adi, a former neighbor, has harassed Queenie for years. Adi would "talk very matter-of-factly and at excessive length about black women being forbidden fruit to Muslim men, but mainly he gave me lots of chat about big black bottoms."[739] Adi exhibits how misogynoir is not exclusive to white folks. Queenie turns to Adi when she feels the sting of her break-up and when she wants a car ride late at night. She wonders, "if Tom wasn't answering [her texts], what would distract me until he did?"[740] As with Bridget Jones, Queenie recognizes that her loneliness springs from her desire for romantic intimacy. Her longing is reminiscent of Marianne's desire to wallow in romantic rejection. Marianne's and Bridget's self-indulgent pitying are charming and relatable, in part because their feelings are wrapped away under their eventual unions. And their unions serve to reify their positions as sympathetic women. But rather than narrativize herself into a romance heroine, Queenie places herself in unwanted sexual situations and uses these scenarios to detach from herself. Queenie, however, undergoes physical and mental violence that ostracizes her from the affective

[739] Carty-Williams, 19.
[740] Carty-Williams, 42.

citizenship afforded to Marianne in the wake of her illness. When she asks for a ride, Adi responds with sexual messages. Queenie capitulates to his relentless harassment. (Note: *Queenie's* depictions of sex are violent and graphic.) In the car, Queenie "dissociated by thinking about how his teeth were so white."[741] She diminishes herself because she knows Adi will forcefully persist and because she feels obligated to exchange herself for a ride.

> He maneuvered me into the position he wanted, and I did as I was told because, frankly, it was easier to just do than to think. If I thought about what I was doing, I'd have to think about why I was doing it, and I wasn't prepared for that at this moment.[742]

Queenie does not have an erotic desire that overrides her logic. Rather, Queenie submits her body to the cultural narratives around her in the hope of diminishing their violence. Queenie grants us interiority to the objectification that is rife in daily life and eighteenth-century romance novels.

Adi is ultimately the least harmful sexual encounter because Queenie's two other sexual partners affect her professional and personal lives. Queenie engages with these men with different expectations. Ted presents as a romantic interest but ultimately reveals his rakish character; Guy is a violent means for Queenie to confirm her abjection. Queenie is at first taken with Ted, who is introduced in a manner that suggests he could be her fated love. Known first as "Tweed Glasses,"[743] Ted appears harmless and supportive–literally so, as when he holds Queenie up mid-panic attack at work. "I swooned. It was so nice to be physically supported by someone."[744] Hitherto, Ted has only made eyes at Queenie; now he enters the scene as her

[741] Carty-Williams, 44.
[742] Carty-Williams, 45.
[743] Carty-Williams, 52.
[744] Carty-Williams, 69.

rescuer, and enables Queenie to play heroine with a swoon. She, like Bridget, begins an email correspondence with Ted. She doesn't respond to his flirtatious emails, but cautiously takes him up on his offer for a drink. She describes "a pop of excitement" in her stomach at the invite.[745] The Anna Howe to her Clarissa, Darcy warns Queenie about the danger of an office romance. Queenie lapses into her typical flirtatious behavior before asking herself "What was I doing?"[746] Akin to Miss Betsy, Queenie must activate her rational mind; but Queenie is *re-learning* the courtship process versus inexperienced heroines visiting the dynamic for the first time. She rushes away from her drink with Ted, only to find herself in his arms again outside the office in the smoking area. Queenie is aware that she is "feeling so vulnerable" emotionally and consequently refuses Ted's advances.[747] He holds her hand and touches her hair, to which Queenie tells him, "I think it's best that you stay away from me."[748] And just as clearly, Ted tells her, "You can't just decide that, Queenie," before kissing her.[749] Queenie asserts her autonomy, and Ted denies it. Ted talks Queenie into sex; the narrative does not depict this, which suggests Queenie dissociates–and is not consenting.

Queenie's passiveness, like eighteenth-century passive obedience, somewhat returns Queenie to normativity by confirming her sexual desirability. Tom may not want her, but this man does. Yet, Queenie's desirability is defined by her social marginalization. Amatory heroines could deploy passive resistance and preserve their virtue; Queenie's virtue, or ethical reputation, is suspect on the basis of her perceived identity. Ted continues to force himself on Queenie, to the detriment of Queenie's job and mental health. Queenie comes to work over the holidays, as

[745] Carty-Williams, 73.
[746] Carty-Williams, 76.
[747] Carty-Williams, 112.
[748] Carty-Williams, 114.
[749] Carty-Williams, 114.

do Ted and Queenie's colleague Silent Jean–an older coworker reminiscent of Helen in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Unable to deter Ted's insistence on talking privately, Queenie locks herself in the bathroom to evade Ted, only for him to touch her sexually when she exists. "'Fuck it,' I purred, melting into him."[750] His violent persistence breaks Queenie. "I walked in like some sort of idiot incapable of independent thought."[751] Ted leads Queenie to question herself. "If I didn't want this, why was I letting it happen? Surely I wanted this?"[752] Queenie tries to rewrite these scenes of violation so that she has agency when men deny her voice and her choices. In the office bathroom, Ted ignores Queenie's physical hesitation and verbal dissent: "'just wait a sec–' I tried to say." "'We should use protect–' I started."[753] Ted refuses to respect Queenie as a person with volition. He instead treats her like the men who send her offensive messages online; but, unlike those men, Ted uses his respectable appearance and physical proximity to violate Queenie. Ted serves himself and further violates Queenie when he reports her at work for sexual harassment. This leads to Queenie's suspension at work and further financial insecurity, which forces her move in with her grandparents. Queenie's family does not have the resources to provide for her long-term; she must obtain financial independence, which is a difficult task given how misogynoir limits her personhood.

Queenie's other sexual narrative illustrates how she attempts to reorient the violence against her to align herself with normativity. Just as with Ted, Queenie interacts with Guy due to her dejected emotional state. Queenie meets Guy at a friend's pub gathering while she is very intoxicated. He informs Queenie that "he'd worked in Cameroon for a year so [he] had a thing

[750] Carty-Williams, 157.
[751] Carty-Williams, 157.
[752] Carty-Williams, 158.
[753] Carty-Williams, 159.

for black girls."[754] Queenie's sex with Guy is immediately violent and warrants a warning. "Temporarily, the pain was numbed by the shock. I squirmed with discomfort, but instead of taking a second to step out of his own pleasure and see that I didn't like what was going on, he reared up and pushed himself into me from behind."[755] Queenie's body says what her voice cannot, but Guy willingly ignores her body and treats her as nothing more than an abstracted concept invented for his pleasure. Carty-Williams vividly describes the pain Queenie suffers, and how the pain increasingly splinters Queenie into submission. "I lay back and let him part my legs, even though I was so disoriented that I couldn't yet register how much pain I was in from our earlier activities."[756] During this difficult-to-read evening with Guy, Queenie receives an enthusiastic text from Darcy. "Who did you leave with? Someone said you left with Welsh Guy, Fran's friend from Oxford? He's very handsome, isn't he? Good prospects too!"[757] Queenie describes Darcy as doing "her best Mrs. Bennet impression" with this text message and posits, "Does any person who didn't go to Oxford care about anyone going there?"[758] Darcy's message further illustrates the socio-cultural dissonance between Queenie and her white peers. Darcy sees value in Guy through superficial attributes: his degree, his face, and his job (he is a doctor). Darcy does not invite Queenie to share her opinion, but instead funnels Queenie and Guy into a harmonious narrative. Queenie's quips around Darcy's message show Queenie's awareness of this forced narrative. Likening Darcy to Mrs. Bennet, she mocks Darcy's optimism as foolish and seemingly dismisses the expectation of romance that appears the moment man and woman leave a space together. And yet, Queenie endorses this narrative, despite the fact that her body is

[754] Carty-Williams, 99.
[755] Carty-Williams, 101.
[756] Carty-Williams, 103.
[757] Carty-Williams, 102.
[758] Carty-Williams, 102, 103.

evidence of its fallacy. Queenie recounts her evening with Guy to Darcy, with a tonal adjustment that rewrites their evening into a pleasurable experience. She tells Darcy they had sex four times, "three times more than Tom could ever manage"[759]—this statement shows how Queenie hopes her recent sexual escapades can feed her emotional turmoil. "It was so hot," she tells Darcy, who does not see through Queenie's performance.[760] As usual, Queenie is aware of how she is scrambling to ameliorate her abjected position. "If I pretended the night had been amazing, maybe I could rewrite the memory of Guy in my head so that I felt like slightly less of a sex aide to him."[761] Queenie, like the heroines before her, is aware of the power of narrative. And, like Arabella, she wields this narrative to identify herself within the proper boundaries of femininity. Queenie wants Darcy's version of events to be true. In Darcy's world, racialized sexual violence does not exist and the romance stories of mainstream culture offer happy endings to characters who look more like her than Queenie. Rewriting Guy to herself and to Darcy as a joyful romp is Queenie attempting to purchase belonging through affective means. But neither Queenie nor her body can deny the reality. Queenie visits a sexual health clinic after unprotected sex with Guy and Adi, which concerns the clinic nurse. More concerning is her external and internal bruising that "are largely consistent with sexual violence."[762] Queenie brushes this concern off and continues her unpleasant affair with Guy–until she later realizes that Guy is her friend Cassandra's boyfriend.

Though devoid of sexual violence, Nina in *Ghosts* likewise approaches romance and the sexual through the romanticized lens of the romance form. Nina reflects on the loneliness she

[759] Carty-Williams, 104.
[760] Carty-Williams, 104.
[761] Carty-Williams, 104.
[762] Carty-Williams, 111.

feels despite her comfortable life. “My solitude was like a gemstone,” she explains.[763] “But underneath this diamond of solitude was a sharp point that I occasionally caught with my bare hands, making it feel like a perilous asset rather than a precious one.”[764] This sharpness is her loneliness that, “once just sad, had recently started to feel frightening.”[765] Nina considers how this loneliness offsets the enjoyment of independent life. Nonetheless, as “a perilous asset,” her single life has an ominous tinge, which is reflected in the brewing fright of loneliness. She is getting too old to be single. The heteronormative nature of Nina’s loneliness comes through when she describes her ideal relationship. “What I wanted now, more than anything, was an ally, she says.[766] As does Queenie; “at least I had an ally,” she says about Tom’s presence at parties.[767] The romance form envisions a romantic union as an allyship. Nina explains what allyship looks like. “Someone to pick apart the dispute with in a hushed voice. I wanted co-conspiring, giddiness. I wanted to be the couple on the platform at Waterloo station who cheered each other on.”[768] Nina’s interest is ostensibly in the mundane. There is no rescue from destitution or public shame. The rescuing is on a much smaller scale. A relationship, for Nina, provides an insular comfort within her socio-cultural setting. This dynamic is one of mutual assurance. This mutual assurance revolves around public interactions–her ideal partner would enable Nina to receive reassurance on her critiques of others, and exhibit in public her romantic desirability. This version of coupledom envisions the intimacy of the private sphere as dependent on the public. Intimacy develops from a shared belief in hierarchical superiority. Nina and her beau can analyze a fight with her neighbor and confirm Nina’s feelings. Her ideal dynamic is that of emotional

[763] Alderton, *Ghosts*, 185.
[764] Alderton, 185.
[765] Alderton, 185.
[766] Alderton, 185.
[767] Carty-Williams, *Queenie*, 36.
[768] Alderton, *Ghosts*, 185.

capitalism. Illouz describes how under capitalism, "there are now new hierarchies of emotional well-being, understood as the capacity to achieve socially and historically situated forms of happiness and well-being."[769] Of course, I understand these hierarchies as endemic to capitalism and feminine belonging, with alterations largely occurring in the socio-cultural packagings of happiness. The eighteenth-century romance form has, like Nina, tended to construct its central dyads as ethically superior to those of its minor characters. Couples like Miss Betsy and Mr. Trueworth or Elizabeth and Darcy share upstanding moralities that enable them to scrutinize their fellow citizens. Their romantic narratives develop towards this shared worldview, which Nina rushes towards with Max, the dating app rake.

Max fulfills Nina's dream, in part because Nina makes him. The pair, early in their relationship, survey others in a park and attempt "to deduce at what point in their burgeoning relationship they all were."[770] Coupledom ensconces Nina and Max through their voyeurism. "We agreed that", "we concluded they'd," "We decided the two men"[771]—every thought is positioned as emerging from Max and Nina as a couple and not individuals. Together, the two develop a new identity based on their romance, and the romances of others. "I liked being a commentator and co-conspirator with Max," Nina says, her language pointing out how they forge a shared identity in their superficial remarks.[772] They build themselves on their ideas about others.

Nina uses imagined others to generate intimacy between her and Max to validate her white femininity, whereas sex for Queenie is confirmation of her non-belonging. But Alderton makes sure to throw in some excess to Nina's character. Nina hesitates to invite Max inside to

[769] Illouz, *Cold Intimacies The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, 73.
[770] Alderton, *Ghosts*, 64.
[771] Alderton, 64–65.
[772] Alderton, 65.

her apartment after a date because she "knew there was a pile of laundry on [her] bed" and "most probably a tab open on a search like: *How many hairs on nipples normal for woman 32??*"[773] Nina's anxieties quickly fade at Max's touch. She remarks that, as their bodies come together, she "was looking for evidence of past lovers. I wanted him inside me so I could search for the ghosts inside him."[774] She inscribes a past through his body. "When he pressed his palm over my mouth, I could see the woman who fucked him to feel freedom in disappearance. When he held a handful of my flesh in his hands, I could tell he'd loved a body more yielding than mine."[775] Nina re-constitutes present and future. Locating past lovers through his body, Nina confirms Max's social desirability. Occupying the space of those past loves, Nina consequently corroborates her desirability and asserts herself in Max's sexual and romantic histories.

Max returns the favor of projecting past into present for the promise of a future; he engages in Nina's nostalgia and generates a fantasy future for them based on little more than the comforts of normativity. While walking around London together, Nina feels something "biological and visceral, prehistoric and predetermining."[776] She feels nostalgia because she has chanced upon the neighborhood she lived in as a child. She lists off idyllic memories of bike riding and pretend play. Max declares, "I will find a way for us to live on this square."[777] Max, rushing forwards even faster than Nina, constructs a fantasy for them to yearn towards. "I think everyone can see themselves here," Nina responds, confirming the universality of this particular white normative idyll.[778] This universalizing of their opinion read alongside Nina's "biological" nostalgia asserts the whiteness of their views. There is something about this street that appeals to

[773] Alderton, 71, 72.
[774] Alderton, 72.
[775] Alderton, 72.
[776] Alderton, 116.
[777] Alderton, 117.
[778] Alderton, 117.

an undeniable human urge. Nonetheless, both Nina and Max give into the fantasy. Max tells Nina he loves her, and she follows suit. "I held his face like a Magic 8 ball. I brought it inches away from mine and peered into his eyes to try to see all the pictures of streets and squares that lived inside him."[779] Paralleling how she wrote his past loves onto his body, Nina feels she can will her desired future into reality.

Yet, Nina expresses ambivalence towards the heteronormative life that such scenes signal because she struggles to decipher the origin of her desires. This ambivalence is the novel's radical potential *and* where the novel succumbs to the romance form because of how this ambivalence is affectively postfeminist. Max finds Nina baking and develops a domestic fantasy replete with children. "His joking words awoke an insatiable craving."[780] This craving parallels the nostalgic drive that pushes Nina towards her childhood neighborhood. It reads as biological, predetermined–and thus as culturally structured as her nostalgia. Nina questions this physical craving for Max's fantasy in a way she does not question her nostalgia. "Had I inherited it? [...] I hadn't made this choice. [...] So who had decided I wanted a baby, more than anything, on my behalf?"[781] Nina even questions marriage, saying "I still didn't know whether I ever wanted to get married" while attending a wedding.[782] But, Nina's introspection is limited. "Getting older was an increasingly perplexing thing, but these moments–understanding that potential future memories were being taken from you year on year, like road closures–were the very worst of it."[783] The present is filled with lack, determined by cultural markers that one has failed to achieve. This temporality is the neoliberal drive of racial capitalism, wherein life gains value

[779] Alderton, 118–19.
[780] Alderton, 251.
[781] Alderton, 251.
[782] Alderton, 192.
[783] Alderton, 192.

through achieving traditional milestones. This temporality generates an affective loss. One's life becomes empty without these milestones and socio-cultural alienation occurs as friends move deeper into their domestic spheres that this temporality demands. Nina does not keep a list of baby names on her phone like her friend Lola. She recognizes the blurriness between her desires and cultural demands. But she does not recognize the ideologies influencing the blurriness and cultural demands. Consequently, she remains within this liminal space of postfeminism, where the innately political choices of marriage and motherhood are seemingly depoliticized because they become individualized and essentialized.

Womanhood is diluted to this axis of choice, and white femininity is the affective means for access to this womanhood. White femininity is *access* but not *acceptance* of this gender ideology. A subject ascends to white feminism when she universalizes her personal acceptance of this individualistic womanhood. She demands this acceptance of everyone. She expects all women to map their lives accordingly, even when misogynoir disbars proximity to white femininity. Nina avoids white feminism and remains within the murkier sphere of white femininity because she retains her ambivalence. Her ambivalence invites sympathy. Indeed, sympathy revolves around this personal ambivalence in the novel. The individual perspective frames sympathy, as in the eighteenth-century romance form. With the individual perspective anchored in white femininity's access to choice, sympathy is only available within the purview of heteronormativity. Nina invites sympathy because of her ambivalence, and she is sympathetic to others in relation to her own ambivalence. The sympathy contract remains, hidden under *Ghosts*'s radical potential. *Ghosts* thus models a girlboss feminism that, wielding the ambivalence of postfeminism, depoliticizes heteronormativity into individual choice.

Friends are exceptional

Denied full feminine citizenship, Queenie does not have access to juxtapolitical choice or the sympathy contract; rather, she functions as a means for white femininity to fulfill the sympathy contract—and bring white femininity into white feminism. Cassandra, Queenie's friend, exemplifies this tipping point when the two friends simultaneously realize that Guy has been cheating on Cassandra with Queenie. Thanks to his name "Guy" and his sexless relationship with Cassandra versus his abusive one with Queenie, none of the three realize their connections until Cassandra sees Guy at Queenie's. Cassandra calls on the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes to protect her heteronormative good life, when she first discovers Guy and Queenie together and later when Queenie visits her. "Guy's said that we can start having a good life together, and I believe him," she tells Queenie.[784] Despite their sexless relationship and his affair, Cassandra and Guy are moving in together and out of London. Cassandra is attached to a fantasy of romantic bliss and views Queenie as a threat to her happiness. Queenie cannot have the good life of romance because she is a threat to that good life. Cassandra tells her,

> "This isn't a choice between you and him, don't be so self-centered," she said. "It's about me. I've found someone that I want to be with. He gives me stability. I can't carry on with the only consistent thing in my life being your problems." She let those words hang in the air. "I've met someone that I love, he loves me, and we're starting a life together."[785]

Cassandra is unable to sympathize with Queenie and cannot see Queenie's perspective, much less what it reveals about her boyfriend. In describing Queenie as "self-centered," Cassandra invalidates Queenie and the truth that Queenie brings with her. Cassandra only accepts Guy's

[784] Carty-Williams, *Queenie*, 221.
[785] Carty-Williams, 221.

shortcomings when he cheats again with another woman. She returns with remorse to Queenie, her friend whose experience she denied for the sake of a fantasy that purchased her citizenship in heteronormativity. Cassandra positions herself as a victim to continue her performance of happiness. She is willing to sacrifice others for this affective belonging. White feminism, rather than white femininity, is the willingness to discard sympathy and disregard intersectionality to protect one's proximity to the good life. English culture's interpretation of Queenie bars her from the good life, the vision of happiness disseminated through the romance form. Whiteness gatekeeps Queenie from sympathy. Queenie's heroine arc requires her to reckon with her exclusion from the sympathy contract and its promise of the good life.

To achieve this, Queenie turns to others, namely her childhood friend Kyazike. While female friendships have always figured in the romance form, *Queenie* prioritizes female friendship founded on sympathetic difference. Queenie asks Kyazike, "Why can't I just have a happy ending, Kyazike?"[786] Queenie is, at the outset of the novel, firmly attached to the promise of the good life, and exhausted by her inability to obtain said life. Kyazike answers with unflinching honesty. "'You joking, fam?' Kyazike laughed. 'You think life is a film? Even if it was, fam, we're black. 'Whatever shade,'' she said, mimicking my voice, 'we'd be first to die.'"[787] Kyazike says the quiet part out loud, the part that Queenie experiences with Cassandra and Tom. Queenie and Kyazike find comfort together in the discomfort of marginalization. Queenie struggles with her Blackness—she does not feel Black enough compared to other Black women and she fears dating a Black man due to childhood trauma. Kyazike continually affirms her friend's identity, in whatever capacity Queenie wants to construct her identity. She recalls their childhood meeting, when Queenie was mocked for being too white. Queenie's response,

[786] Carty-Williams, 226.
[787] Carty-Williams, 207.

which Kyazike offers now to Queenie, was ". . . You said that I could be any type of black girl that I wanted to be."[788] Their shared exclusion from the good life becomes a means of connection for the pair. Their intimacy, built upon their shared exclusion in childhood, revolves around complete transparency without judgment. They each live their lives in front of the other and, in this openness, provide comfort. Queenie helps Kyazike with her weave, a display of physical intimacy generated through cultural familiarity that Queenie lacks with her white friends. They also recognize each other's difference, Kyazike's Ugandan heritage and her interest in fashion. Kyazike comedically faults Queenie taking them to a club crowded with white people. "You're Caribbean. Brixton is you lot's domain. You should know what's going on in your area. The same way that I'm African, and Peckham is my lot's domain."[789] Kyazike laments that "*gentrification* is the reason [she's] wasted [her] makeup."[790] Both women remark upon the neighborhood's changes through engaging in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Kyazike invites Queenie, who is at first unwilling to attend a march due to her discomfort with crowds. "This is bigger than me," Queenie tells Kyazike as confirmation she will attend.[791] Queenie listens to a series of speakers.

> We all watched, being hit by bullets of sorrow and anger as family members and friends of black men and women who had been killed unlawfully stood up on that podium one by one and recounted not just how those who had been lost had died, but how they were kind, they were loved, they had children, they were children.[792]

[788] Carty-Williams, 294.
[789] Carty-Williams, 122.
[790] Carty-Williams, 121.
[791] Carty-Williams, 177.
[792] Carty-Williams, 178.

Carty-Williams writes the protest as a communal scene. Queenie's narratorial voice becomes part of a communal pain and a desire for change. "Then, we marched. We all walked, in droves, toward the Brixton police station, the atmosphere electric, the crowd not angry, not aggressive, but charged. Charged and wanting answers, wanting to be heard."[793] Carty-Williams grounds this protest in both global and local contexts through the popular protest chants and Queenie's memories. ""NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE!" We passed the back of the market. Instead of the fruit and vegetable stalls I'd been dragged to on a Saturday morning by my grandmother and thought I'd still recognize, more white kids spilled out holding colorful cans of beer."[794] Queenie personifies her home. "Brixton. When had she been stripped of her identity? Why hadn't I *properly* noticed?"[795] Queenie finds "a new brand of anger flooding [her] system" as she realizes her community is being erased for whiteness. Queenie's self-chastising implies how the romance narrative can override other realities of life. Queenie now unites past and present, as she remarks on the march ending in Windrush Square, so-named for "a ship and a voyage where it had all begun for some of our ancestors." [796] For Queenie, sympathy arises from an appreciation for difference, shown on a micro and macro scale through her friendship with Kyazike and her political investments.

Friendship figures differently in *Ghosts* and displays how passive aggression functions within whiteness. The pregnant Katherine tells Nina that she and her husband are "starting conversations about godparents."[797] Nina's comedic response barely disguises her perception that

[793] Carty-Williams, 178.
[794] Carty-Williams, 178–79.
[795] Carty-Williams, 179.
[796] Carty-Williams, 179. In 1948, over 1,000 individuals–nearly 700 of whom planned to remain in the UK and were majority Jamaican–journeyed from Jamaica to London on the *Empire Windrush*. "The Story of the Windrush," Royal Museums Greenwich, accessed February 13, 2024, https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/windrush-histories/story-of-windrush-ship.
[797] Alderton, *Ghosts*, 94.

Katherine is annoyingly smug about her life. "And how many of the UN are involved?" Nina says.[798] Katherine recognizes the aggression in Nina's joke. "I watched the inner conflict manifest on her face, trying to decide whether to jump on the joke and be a satirist with me, or defend her pomposity and be an arsehole."[799] Katherine signals her awareness and plays the game, or, hidden battle between singledom and motherhood. Initiating the passive aggression, Nina is defending herself. Nina believes that Katherine looks down on her for being single. Nina feels she must defend her singleness, and she does so by deflating Katherine's happiness. This dynamic turns Nina's singleness into a choice, with the only other choice being marriage and mother. Seeing her friend's choices as a commentary on herself and as a competition, Nina reifies postfeminist individualism with her passive aggression. Typically taking the form of dialogue, Nina's narration houses most of the novel's passive aggression. In this scene, Nina reflects on Katherine verbally sparring with her. "*You don't get to be both,* I wanted to say to her. *Which are you, Katherine? A satirist or an arsehole?*"[800] This comment can, like most of Nina's thoughts about her friends, be said of Nina, as well. Is she, in her passive aggressiveness, being an asshole or being a true friend through an ironic performance of intimacy? White femininity sits between these attitudes because it mediates cultural power and personal experience. With Katherine, Nina critiques the family structure to make herself feel better about her singleness. With her single friend Lola, Nina also makes herself feel better about her singleness by positioning Lola's energetic personality as desperation against Nina's cynicism. Nina, after Lola declares she "will probably be pregnant" in a year or so, describes how Lola's "illogical optimism about the exact trajectory of her life never failed to make me glow with fondness for

[798] Alderton, 95.
[799] Alderton, 95.
[800] Alderton, 95.

her."[801] Nina's judgments against both friends offset her as exceptional. In her passive aggressive judgments, Nina can shift her meaning as suits her in the moment. These shifts likewise enable Nina to access sympathy at various locations. Nina can achieve this complex play of juxtapolitical feminism because she is deeply rooted in the systems of racial capitalism. She is comfortable–unquestioning of the opportunities that allow her to move through life without the oppressive barriers that obstruct a person like Queenie. It is not just that Nina is born white and blonde, but that she lives within networks that prop up her whiteness and she relates affectively to these networks through passivity.

Taking comfort in the past

Comfort ultimately expresses Nina's passivity in her socio-cultural networks. Nina expresses this comfort with Max, in terms of her nostalgia for her upbringing and her desire to recreate this past in her future. Most of Nina's childhood was spent in a suburb of London, where her parents still live. Comfort reigns here, too. "Nothing about where my parents lived brought them any sensory pleasure or cause for relish," Nina states.[802] "They had built their home and therefore entire life around convenience."[803] When she visits home she "could be seventeen again" and "could pretend that my world was myopic and my choices were meaningless and the possibilities that were ahead of me were wide open and boundless."[804] Nina's parental home provides the comfort of whiteness in the complacency of their house and town as well as the safe and responsibility-free nostalgia these spaces provide for Nina. Rupturing this respite is Nina's father's declining mental health, and her mother's struggle to adapt. His accelerating dementia

[801] Alderton, 55.
[802] Alderton, 17.
[803] Alderton, 17.
[804] Alderton, 18.

lends another meaning to the book's title, *Ghosts*—father and suitor are linked, as are memory and imagined futures. Her father's illness seeps into every aspect of Nina's narrative. Nina frequently recounts memories not only of her father, but also teenage years with Katherine, college days with Lola, and her twenties with her ex. The past informs Nina's present and future. She remains friends with Katherine largely because of their shared history. And she projects a nostalgic future with Max. She imitates, rather than expands on, the past. Arabella imitated old novels for their safe escapisms. Similarly, the past offers Nina a comforting and familiar logic through which to see her self.

Nina, as an ideal neoliberal citizen, commodifies her nostalgia. A newly successfully food writer, Nina has "signed another soulless brand partnership deal to pay the mortgage."[805] The partnership is condensed milk; she pairs the milk with a banana and serves the snack to her father, because it was a childhood favorite. Upon eating the snack, Nina's father emerges from his mental confusion and chattily recalls enjoying the same snack with his family. From this interaction, Nina develops her third book, "a book of recipes, stories and science."[806] As with her previous books, Nina is selling her identity. This is increasingly necessary under neoliberalism, though some identities sell more than others. Nina's story ends with her ready to sell herself again, both in romance and business. In the final chapter, Nina and Lola bemoan dating and Lola's latest rake. Lola re-downloads the dating app on Nina's phone–allowing Nina to remain passively attached to romance. Lola "placed the phone in the palm of [Nina's] hand and the screen shone with bright uncertainty."[807] The allure of romance remains. In the epilogue, Nina's happy ending shines the spotlight on her personally informed professional life. Though absent a

[805] Alderton, 78.
[806] Alderton, 113.
[807] Alderton, 300.

suitor, the narrative still culminates in the tantalizing promise of the good life, with some ambivalence along the way. Nina celebrates another birthday with a picnic, to which she invites family and friends with the request to bring a nostalgic childhood treat as book research. Nina imagines how her friends' baby will pine for his childhood, specifically his childhood car. "One day that baby will sit on a bench, wondering if that navy car is scrap metal somewhere, wishing it could come collect them."[808] Centered on a commodity, this imagined nostalgia is heavily neoliberal–nostalgia is not for the familial estate but private transportation. Nina pairs this thought with her own memories of her father and his fluctuating ability to recall them. When blowing out her candles, Nina "think[s] of all the paths that lie ahead, none of which I can see yet. None of which I can plan for, only walk towards with faith."[809] Nina generates radical potential through her commitment to her neoliberal career and acceptance of her singleness. While she is not forcing a Magic 8 Ball to deliver her desires, she remains within reach of the normative good life.

Like her nostalgia, Nina's heroine journey is founded on stasis. Her story begins where it ends, as with her eighteenth-century predecessors. In the age of digital surveillance, Nina's rake emerges from a screen and operates much more subtly than *Fantomina*'s Beauplaisir. Cultural pressure does not come in the form of a dying father's request or serial kidnappings. Neoliberalism brings her romantic adventure inwards, while her relatable postfeminism structures her introspection. Her postfeminism likewise ameliorates the tension of the personal and culture, which are difficult to separate in the muddled neoliberal landscape. Postfeminist ambivalence allows Nina to integrate her excesses (her age and her contentedness with singledom) into her white femininity. Postfeminist ambivalence enables a modern passive

[808] Alderton, 302.
[809] Alderton, 304.

obedience. This ambivalence becomes a comfort in of itself, as it serves as a means for relating to others and relating to herself. Comfort, likewise, keeps her in proximity to the heteronormative good life, ensuring that the allure of conformity will remain.

Queenie also brings its heroine to a place of self-acceptance in which career ambitions trump men; this self-acceptance, however, is formulated through community rather than through one individual's experiences. Queenie receives a referral for counseling after the health clinic providers express concern for her welfare. Queenie wades through misgivings about receiving mental health care. "Am I damaged beyond repair?" Queenie asks Darcy over e-mail after receiving the referral.[810] In an eighteenth-century romance, the answer to this question would be yes, unless Queenie can leverage white feminine virtue to salvage her public reputation. Queenie's discussions with friends and family show therapy's proximity to whiteness. Darcy is unfazed by Queenie's self-deprecation and the suggestion of therapy. Kyazike understands Queenie's anxiety more. "Queenie. I'm Ugandan. You think anyone in my family is allowed to say they need help? You bury that shit and you move on. If I told my mum I need counseling, she'd ship me over to Kampala in a cargo barrel."[811] Kyazike supports Queenie more readily than her grandmother, who iterates similar disdain as Kyazike's mother. "You trying to shame all ah we?" she asks Queenie, when she learns Queenie is considering therapy.[812]

> "You know how much pain me carry?" My grandmother slammed her hand on the table. "You know how much pain I have to tek tru' my yout' and my twenties and beyond? You know what my madda, your grandmadda, woulda said if me did tell her me ah go seek psychotherapy? You mus' be MAD.'"[813]

[810] Carty-Williams, *Queenie*, 183.
[811] Carty-Williams, 225.
[812] Carty-Williams, 239.
[813] Carty-Williams, 239.

Introspectively examining one's self is a privilege not afforded to racialized immigrants like Queenie's family. In a narrative twist, Queenie's grandfather supports counseling. "Maybe if all ah we had learned to talk about our troubles, we wouldn't carry so much on our shoulders all the way to the grave. [...] Maybe we haffi learn from this new generation, Veronica."[814] Queenie is generating a new emotional model.

Within the container of therapy, Queenie expresses that which society has forced her to repress under the weight of discrimination. She shares slices of her unstable childhood with her therapist. As a young child, Queenie moved with her single mother from her grandparents into a small house. Their close relationship was sundered when her mother's partner joins the family. This partner, who is Jamaican, was physically and verbally abusive to Queenie and her mother. Queenie nonchalantly explains, "He'd break my things, tell my mum I'd said rude things about him, or stolen from her, he'd make me sleep in the car."[815] Sylvie finds another place for her and Queenie. But Queenie, at age 11, ends up living in the apartment alone until moving in with her estranged father. "You witnessed some traumatic things," her therapist tells her.[816] To which Queenie flippantly responded, "It happens a lot in my culture. Us black girls, we're always meant to know our place."[817] Queenie becomes increasingly expressive and voluble as she unloads the racial pressures that constrain her daily. After she is refused peace at the pool, Queenie unloads on her therapist, Janet.

> "I can't wake up and not be a black woman, Janet. I can't walk into a room and not be a black woman, Janet. On the bus, on the Tube, at work, in the cafeteria. *Loud*, *brash*, *sassy*, *angry*, *mouthy*, *confrontational*, *bitchy*." I listed off all of my usual descriptors on

[814] Carty-Williams, 240.
[815] Carty-Williams, 274.
[816] Carty-Williams, 274.
[817] Carty-Williams, 274.

my fingers. “There are ones people think are nice, though: *well-spoken*, *surprisingly intelligent*, *exotic*. My favorite is *sexy*, I think? I guess I should be grateful for any attention at all.” My voice was getting hoarse. “You know, when we go out, my friends get chatted up by guys who say, ‘I’d love to take you for dinner,’ and in the same *breath* they come over to *me*, put their hands on my bum, and tell me they want to take me back to theirs and fuck me over the arm of the sofa. This past year has shown me that I can’t have a boyfriend who loves me, who can stop and think about what I might be going through.” I dug my nails into the arms of the chair. “I can’t have any love in my life that isn’t completely fucked by my fear that I’ll be rejected just for being born *me*. Do you know how that feels, Janet?”[818]

This is Queenie’s hair-ripping, Violenta moment. Unlike Violenta and most other heroines, Queenie is aware of systemic and structural oppressions, rather than the singular oppression of gender. Further, Queenie cannot reframe her abjection back into virtue—because, she was never virtuous in the way Violenta or Clarissa was, and she will never be allowed to claim such passive virtue. Gaslit and gatekept from feminine citizenship, Queenie cannot girlboss her way through heteropatriarchy. With no access to choice, Queenie must create her own survival mechanism. Through therapy, Queenie learns how her familial inheritances have shaped her manner of proceeding through the world. Therapy helps her change her affective relationship to her personal and familial past by providing the psychic space for reflection to which our traditional romance heroines have always had access. Queenie reckons with her past and begins to ground herself in the present moment, rather than in her projection of a good life. Queenie starts to care for herself when her anxiety arises. She tells herself to “*Just breathe”* and “*find your safe*

[818] Carty-Williams, 275.

space"[819]—which is the attic of her grandparents' home. Though their familiar home space comes with strict rules, her grandparents' offers her some comfort.

This comfort is interactive rather than the psychic comfort of Nina's home. Before finances force Queenie to move back in with them, Queenie takes a bath at their house—their cleanliness, and her inherited cleanliness is a running theme. Knowing she is struggling, her grandmother comes in and washes Queenie's back. "I'm not a baby," Queenie tells her, but her grandmother insists.[820] She soothes Queenie with her motherly touch and a story from her past that she has never shared about falling in love with another man as a young teenage mother, only belatedly learning upon the reappearance of Queenie's grandfather that he had temporarily left to set up a life in England for them. Such specific stories differ from the backstories of other heroine's mothers. These mothers are often absent, dead with little information, or—like Bridget's and Nina's mothers—vague about their domestic life as being a burden from which they now wish to escape. Learning more about her family's lived experiences informs Queenie's internal reflections. Through relating to herself within her familial and cultural settings, Queenie learns to relate to others differently. Namely, Queenie develops sympathy for her mother, with whom she has had a tense relationship. When her mother first visits Queenie in the novel, Queenie pretends to be sleep. She overhears her mother discussing a lawsuit against her abusive ex-partner and her regret over Queenie's childhood. This brings tears to Queenie's eyes, but she tells herself, "I wouldn't feel sorry for her. She'd made her mistakes, and now we both had to live with them."[821] And yet after therapy, Queenie sees her mother in a new light. "How could I have been so selfish, how couldn't I have seen? […] She'd been so mentally and physically

[819] Carty-Williams, 265.
[820] Carty-Williams, 90.
[821] Carty-Williams, 152.

battered by men that she couldn't find her voice anymore. But she was still my mum."[822] Gothic romance novels–which are out of the scope of this study–often turn to familial discoveries as narrative turning points. Queenie, however, knew her familial history. What changes is her affective relationship to that history, which therapy helps her grapple with. *Queenie*'s portrayal of therapy positions a model of sympathy grounded in contextualizing the self within larger social and cultural networks, a process that engenders an interpersonal union that benefits intrapersonal connections.

Queenie ends in an inversion of its opening. Queenie is not alone, nor is she the subject of medical scrutiny. She is with her family and friends, including her teenage cousin Diana, celebrating Queenie's mental health recovery. Like Maggie did with Queenie in the opening, Queenie shares life knowledge with Diana. But Queenie speaks to Diana on a broad socio-cultural level. "You'll meet people who 'don't see race' and are 'color-blind,' but that's a lie. They do see it," she tells her cousin.[823] "And people should see it. We're different, and they need to accept our difference."[824] Queenie delivers her the lessons she has learned over the narrative, lessons that the romance form does not provide. "We aren't here for an easy ride," she tells her cousin.[825] "People are going to try to put you in a mold, they're going to tell you who you should be and how you should act. You're going to have to work hard to carve out your own identity, but you can do it."[826] This scene offers one more prong to the novel's model of sympathy: future-oriented advice for surviving outside of hegemony. Part of this future is the togetherness of self and community, seen in the "we" that Queenie used earlier during the BLM protest. "I'm here

[822] Carty-Williams, 270.
[823] Carty-Williams, 319.
[824] Carty-Williams, 319.
[825] Carty-Williams, 319.
[826] Carty-Williams, 319.

with you," she tells her cousin as a final reminder of the importance of seeing the self through the community.[827] Queenie and Diana's dynamic is quite different from Emma's mentorship of Harriet, just as Queenie and Kyazike's friendship is different from the friendships between Nina and Katherine. Those relationships depend upon maintaining parallel understandings of virtue and society. Queenie's relationships depend on commonality that invites difference.

Over the course of the novel, Queenie increasingly asserts herself and consequently removes historical and cultural identities that trapped her within a subservient and racialized persona. This includes the white femininity that the romance form has sedimented over the centuries. Queenie tries and fails to imitate the romance form's feminine model because it is the dominant mode for living under heteropatriarchy. White femininity, though not crystallized in its early romance days, metabolizes the ideologies of racial capitalism to gain dominance. Disbarred from the sympathetic victimhood of white femininity on the basis of these ideologies, Queenie explores an alternative sympathy. This sympathy mediates the individual and different communal networks as experienced historically and presently. Familial and cultural history, shared abjection, and internal reckonings are components of this mediated sympathy. Difference–rather than hegemonic alignment–is at the core of these components. Queenie learns to wield difference as a means for resisting oppression and demonstrates how safety can be found in discomfort.

Holding *Ghosts* and *Queenie* together illustrates how the eighteenth-century romance form has adapted to neoliberal concerns. The passivity of the eighteenth-century was a means for white femininity to enact choice when choice seemed unavailable. *Ghosts* illustrates how passivity has adapted to preserve white femininity's socio-cultural hierarchy. Passivity is a vehicle for flaunting the access to choice that white femininity now seemingly affords women.

[827] Carty-Williams, 319.

Marriage and children are culturally presented as a choice to white women, with work seemingly becoming another sphere of choice. *Ghosts* portrays how these are false choices, as heteronormativity continues to maintain hegemony. Late-stage capitalist white femininity cannot fully understand the structures that enforce this choice and how this notion of choice continues to marginalize non-white people and women of color. White feminism focalizes its politics around this parochial understanding of life choices that reinforces gender and race hierarchies. *Queenie* is a case study of the romance form without white femininity. This study fails spectacularly, reinforcing the co-dependence of the romance form and white femininity. In narrativizing Queenie's social rejection from the romance mode on account of her abjection from white femininity, Queenie illustrates how the affective constructions in the eighteenth-century romance form have accrued immense cultural power in the schema of racial capitalism. Only a feminine citizen who deploys sympathy, passivity, and victimhood within the parameters of whiteness can enter the romance mode and adventure towards the good life.

'They'll tell you I'm insane'

Candice Carty-Williams, when writing *Queenie*, shared on Twitter that she had drafted a novel that "was like a black Bridget Jones."[828] This comparison, she says, led her agent to contact her. She "slid into my DMs two seconds later asking to see," Carty-Williams said, exaggerating to illustrate the appeal such a description holds in the publishing world.[829] Carty-Williams explains that she made the comparison with the industry in mind. "There's a feeling among publishers that if there's a person of colour as the protagonist, a white person won't be

[828] Susannah Butter, "It's High Time Black Women Had a Voice; Her Debut Novel Has Stormed Bestseller Lists and Been Called a Politicised Bridget Jones. Candice Carty-Williams Tells Susannah Butter How She Wrote Queenie for Young People like Her," *The London Evening Standard*, accessed September 12, 2022, https://go-gale-com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/ps/i.do?p=ITOF&u=tel_a_vanderbilt&id=GALE|A583420366&v=2.1&it=r.
[829] Butter.

able to relate," she told *Grazia*.[830] Bridget Jones became a way for the predominately white publishing industry to understand *Queenie*, both in terms of content and profit. "It helped publishers feel safe, but also me to feel safe."[831] Citing *Bridget Jones's Diary* in an interview question on representation, Carty-Williams explains, "I remember trying to find myself in stories."[832] Even though stories like *Jones* seemingly centralize an average woman, these stories understand the average or universal is tethered to whiteness. As another example, Carty-Williams references the eponymous character of *Fleabag*, a creation from Phoebe Waller-Bridge that explores grief and trauma. In the second season premiere, Fleabag, whom the lithe Waller-Bridge portrays, dons a black jumpsuit to a family dinner. Also in attendance is the Hot Priest who is marrying her father and step-mother and with whom Fleabag has an ongoing erotic connection. TV critic Kathryn Van Arendonk wrote an article about the jumpsuit titled "I Bought the *Fleabag* Jumpsuit," in which Van Arendonk describes the duality of the jumpsuit and how it parallels Fleabag herself.[833] The show is, according to Van Arendonk, a "grief-filled, sexy, self-aware tragicomedy" and the jumpsuit displays a rare moment of self-possession for Fleabag, who appears in it as "both confident and alluring without sliding over into the territory of too sexual, too direct, too much."[834] Nonetheless, "[t]he jumpsuit still invites thirst; it still suggests that she's a powerful, attractive person."[835] The jumpsuit's fanfare emblematizes a specific romanticization

[830] Radhika Sanghani, "Queenie Author Candice Carty-Williams: 'I Loved Bridget Jones, But I Wanted To See Myself In A Book,'" Grazia, accessed September 12, 2022, https://graziadaily.co.uk/life/tv-and-film/queenie-book-candice-carty-williams/.
[831] Sanghani, "Queenie Author Candice Carty-Williams."
[832] Hannah Keegan, "Candice Carty Williams Explains Why Queenie Will Never Be a 'Black Bridget Jones,'" Stylist, April 3, 2019, https://www.stylist.co.uk/books/candice-carty-williams-queenie-representation-sex/259605.
[833] Kathryn Van Arendonk, "I Bought the Fleabag Jumpsuit," The Cut, May 31, 2019, https://www.thecut.com/2019/05/i-bought-the-fleabag-jumpsuit.html.
[834] Van Arendonk.
[835] Van Arendonk.

of mental illness and neurodivergence available to otherwise normative feminine citizens. Queenie's mental health struggles never generate such allure.

This whitewashed romanticization is nothing new. Indeed, this romanticization is an undercurrent in the eighteenth-century romance form. Arabella and Clarissa are the two most obvious examples of women whose mental instability becomes central to their heroine status. Clarissa's mental deterioration in the final third of the novel and ensuing physical decline is especially romanticized because it makes manifest her ideal femininity. Arabella's mental state is the basis of *The Female Quixote*'s satire. Nonetheless, her case is evidence of heteropatriarchy's sustained weaponization of "rationality." Rationality as conceived in the eighteenth century is still the litmus test for personhood in Anglo-American culture.[836] The romance form works in parallel with this ongoing Enlightenment-era of personhood. Its mediation of excess and construction of an ideal femininity serves this construct of personhood. At heart, the romance form, as a tool of normative women's culture, is a technology for interpellating women into feminine citizens who subscribe to the rationality of racial capitalism. The romance form narrativizes ideal white femininity into a playful romp. The romance form maintains appeal by adapting its rhetoric to contemporary moments and projecting a sense of agency within its narratives and through the affective circulations amongst readers. These circulations and the commodity nature of the romance form, along with its focalizing of feminine desire, synthesize women's culture into an intimate public. Women's culture leverages the romance form into the romance mode, inculcating romanticization into its feminine citizens' conception of the good life. Women's culture promulgates the romance mode as embodied mimesis of the romance form.

[836] Stacy Simplican considers how eighteenth-century personhood, especially as constructed through John Locke, depends on an exclusionary construct of rationality. Stacy Clifford Simplican, *The Capacity Contract: Intellectual Disability and the Question of Citizenship* (Minneapolis ; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

In truth, both mode and form are mimetic appropriations that preserve hegemonic ideologies by subsuming progressive and subversive affects. Romance continually restructures itself to portray white femininity as a sympathetic victim in need of heteropatriarchy. Throughout its eighteenth-century evolution, the romance form has uplifted feminine passivity beginning with amatory fiction's innovative critique of gender politics. In cyclical fashion, the terms of passivity are rewritten. Whether the rhetoric is sentimentality or postfeminism, the romance form ensures that readers can interpret its heroines as surviving the threats of patriarchy through capitulation. Submitting becomes resistance. With this ill-defined resistance, readers can keep projecting agency, keep imagining affective resistance, keep holding themselves within the romantic liminality.

"We return to fantasy not to forget, but to remember: other futures are possible," Anne Helen Petersen writes in a 2023 Substack post.[837] Petersen is commenting on the big story of the moment: Taylor Swift's new romance with Travis Kelce. Petersen's post title is "You Only Like the Beginning of Things." Without naming it, Petersen describes Lauren Berlant's state of cruel optimism, the comfortable discomfort of grasping for an impossible future devoid of discontent. A central figure of women's culture today, Taylor Swift lives the romance mode and pens her songs accordingly. Her global fame necessarily invites criticism, which includes deriding her as a crazy maneater. Swift addresses this label with her song "Blank Space." "They'll tell you I'm insane," Swift sings about her exes in the song.[838] Swift plays into the crazy trope but in such a way that fails to critique the villainization and romanticization of so-called "craziness." Instead, she refutes the label and looks incredibly glamorous as a crazy ex-girlfriend in her music video.

[837] Anne Helen Petersen, "You Only Like the Beginning of Things," Substack newsletter, *Culture Study* (blog), November 15, 2023, https://annehelen.substack.com/p/you-only-like-the-beginning-of-things.
[838] Taylor Swift, "Blank Space," Spotify, *1989* (Big Machine, 2014), https://open.spotify.com/track/1p80LdxRV74UKvL8gnD7ky.

Swift epitomizes white femininity. The alterations in her style and music reflect contemporary trends and keep her in constant circulation. Swift began her career as a folksy "Live, Laugh, Love" girl, then reinvented herself as a "Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girlboss" girl—not as Austen's ironic narrators would but as Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey* would. Fortunately, her private jet helps her comfortably navigate her labyrinths of romance. Always the victim of bad press and unwilling to take any declarative stance on matters of substance, she traffics in feminine excess that toes the line of too muchness, just like Fleabag's jumpsuit or Melliora's erotic desire in *Love in Excess*. Swift is an expert of commodifying the romance form well beyond the novel but close to its eighteenth-century roots.

And thus ended an Intrigue, which, considering the Time it lasted, was as full of Variety as any, perhaps, that many Ages has produced.[839]

[839] Haywood, *Fantomina and Other Works*, 71.

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