

Université de Montréal

The Woman Novelist as Philosopher:
An Enquiry into the Works of Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane
Austen

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Résumé

Cette thèse porte sur l'œuvre littéraire de trois romancières anglaises du XVIIIe siècle : Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe et Jane Austen. À travers l'analyse de leurs romans, je démontre comment elles ont utilisé ce genre littéraire relativement nouveau, pour aborder les problèmes philosophiques centraux de cette époque. Afin de soutenir que ces écrivaines ont utilisé le roman pour aborder des problèmes philosophiques, je dois démontrer, dans un premier temps, la capacité des œuvres littéraires en général à produire un contenu cognitif et à générer des connaissances. Mon propos me conduit ensuite à démontrer comment elles ont contribué significativement à problématiser et explorer ce que j'appelle « Le problème de la Modernité », soit le sentiment d'aliénation produit à l'époque moderne par la séparation entre le sujet humain, le monde et les autres humains. J'expose alors comment ce sentiment d'aliénation est au cœur des romans de Frances Burney, dont les héroïnes, dépossédées de leur identité sociale, errent sans protection, dans un monde hostile. Je démontre également comment les romans gothiques d'Ann Radcliffe, malgré leurs horreurs, offrent un moyen « esthétique » de faire face à cette aliénation. J'explique finalement comment Jane Austen tente de reconstruire le rapport du sujet humain au monde par l'entremise de l'imagination et de la fiction, d'une part, et de notre engagement moral envers autrui, d'autre part. Enfin, l'analyse de leurs œuvres permet de démontrer comment leurs réflexions au sujet de la précarité du sujet moderne rejoint les préoccupations des philosophes avec lesquels ces romancières sont en discussion.

Mots-clés : romancières britanniques, littérature du XVIIIe siècle, philosophie des Lumières, aliénation, cognitivisme littéraire.

Abstract

This dissertation looks at the work of three prominent women novelists of the long eighteenth century: Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen. Through a close analysis of their novels, I demonstrate how mid-eighteenth-century to early nineteenth-century British women authors used the novel, a relatively new literary genre, to engage with some of the central philosophical problems of their time. I explore how novels, being works of fiction, contain certain “truths,” notably forms of knowledge about humans and the world, thus serving as important sources of learning. Since the philosophical problems addressed by philosophers in the eighteenth century were numerous, I narrow their scope significantly, focusing on what I call “the modern predicament,” that is, the sentiment of alienation produced by the separation of the human subject from the world and other humans. I demonstrate how this sentiment of alienation is at the core of Frances Burney’s novels, whose heroines, dispossessed of social identity, wander without much protection in a hostile world. I also demonstrate how Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic novels, in spite of their horrors, provide an aesthetic way of coping with personal alienation and imagining a better state of the world. Finally, I show how Jane Austen’s novels suggest ways of reconciling the subject, others, and the world through the literary imagination and mutual sympathy. Most importantly, I show how these women novelists engage with and revise the ideas of modern philosophers.

Keywords: British women novelists, eighteenth-century literature, Enlightenment philosophy, alienation, literary cognitivism.

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Introduction

Eighteenth-Century British Women Novelists and Philosophy

In the eighteenth century, philosophers struggled to overcome the problems generated by the central epistemological position of the human subject brought about by the subjective turn in modern philosophy. While a belief in the centrality of the human subject suggested a human supremacy over transcendent sources of knowledge such as God or transcendent ideas, it involved nonetheless a recognition of a commonplace human feeling of isolation from the world and its potential reification through the eyes of others. In this context, my claim is that novels, especially those written by women, tackled this difficulty more acutely, providing a clearer and more detailed representation of the isolation and alienation of the modern subject and offering interesting solutions to its predicament. More specifically, I contend that eighteenth-century British women novelists had an acute awareness of the problems caused by the modern conception of the self. They chose to exemplify and discuss these problems through the adventures of their novel's heroines, who struggle to find and maintain their identity—hiding their name, searching for it, or hoping to change it—and who fail most of the time to be recognized by others. Lost in an estranged world, they “wander,” like Burney's last heroine, Juliet, in search of a possible reconciliation with the world at large and towards a stabilization of their own identity. The problem of personal identity, the difficulty to connect with the world and others, the danger of being reified by others or to be denied any social identity, can also be found in the novels of male writers of the same period, such as Fielding or Sterne. However, these problems have a particular resonance in eighteenth-century women's novels, where they distill an atmosphere of fear and anxiety. As I will argue in chapter one, eighteenth-century British women were not participating as fully and actively in the public sphere as men did. Their

choices in life were restricted and few, and their capacity to own property and inherit estates were very restricted. Due to these constraints, they might have felt more keenly what it felt like to be estranged and alienated.¹

Among the scholars who have shown an interest in the relationships between modern philosophy and literary works, notably the novel, are Ian Watt, John Bender, J. Paul Hunter, Micheal McKeon, Adela Pinch, Helen Thompson, Nancy Armstrong, Jonathan Kramnick, and Thomas S. Manganaro.² Despite the diversity of their writings and positions, they seem to share a basic understanding of what Enlightenment philosophy and culture was – one that this dissertation rethinks. While they do not partake of the moral condemnation of Enlightenment that characterizes the work of some critics and philosophers, they tend nonetheless to envisage this period as determined by the triumph

¹ I do not mean here to present a monolithic and radical picture of eighteenth-century women as being utterly confined to their houses. Of course, they participated actively in public events and entertainments by going to public places like the Ranelagh gardens, water resorts, the opera, assemblies, and balls. Some of them, like Elizabeth Montague and Hester Thrale, hosted “salons” where they entertained fashionable writers and painters. As writers, they often used their novels to engage with public issues, social problems, and politics. As Katherine Binhammer explains, the nineteenth-century domestic ideology was not dominant at the time. According to her, “The ‘domestic woman thesis’ is a gender ideology”(4) that was still “in flux during the eighteenth century” (4). She contradicts authors such as Nancy Armstrong, who claims that this domestic ideal was constructed in the eighteenth-century, through the consolidation of gender differences. In continuity with Katharine Binhammer, Betty Schellenberg argues, for her part, that eighteenth-century women novelists were shrewd negotiators and that they participated actively in the public sphere of print. While I agree that the domestic ideal was not yet established in the eighteenth century and that many examples seem to deny its prominence, we must nevertheless acknowledge that British women were not encouraged to play an important role in economic and political affairs and that their education did not prepare them for such a vocation. After all, they could not attend universities or become members of Parliament. Their capacity to own property or inherit money or estates was very limited. When they marry, their inheritance and property were transferred to their husbands. While they can remain single, they were generally expected to marry and encouraged, through conduct books and other means, to embrace the emerging and growing values of domestic ideology, as it is clearly suggested in the novels of Burney, Radcliffe, and Austen. For further readings on this subject, see Katharine Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800*; Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*; and Betty Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-century Britain*.

² See J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: the Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*; Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*; Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*; John Bender, *Ends of Enlightenment*; Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think*; Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen*; Helen Thompson, *Fictional Matters: Empiricism, Corpuscles, and the Novel*; Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson*; and Thomas Salem Manganaro, *Against Better Judgment*.

or reason, the use of empiricist methods, and the domination of a mechanical view of nature.³ While I do agree that the Enlightenment possessed some of these characteristics, I also hold that it was an age of doubt and skepticism, where philosophers and novelists questioned the omnipotence of reason, the limits of human knowledge, the failures of personal identity, and the threats posed by the subject's alienation and isolation. I also contend, in contrast to some of these scholars, that these doubts were not elaborated solely within the realm of the literary, but extended to philosophers' works as well.⁴ Therefore, this dissertation argues for a complimentary and necessary participation of novelists in the

³ The mechanistic view of eighteenth-century thought is grounded on the influence of philosophers like Descartes and Hobbes. According to this view, the human body and the physical objects of the world can be understood as determined by a series of external causes. This schema, taken integrally, may undermine the concept of freedom, understood as human's ability to self-determination. Therefore, there was, in the eighteenth-century, a tension between philosophers who thought that the mind and the will could not be understood mechanically, and others who did and who therefore restricted human freedom to the ability to act without being externally impeded. Jonathan Kramnick has presented very clearly the tension between mechanical and external causation and the vindication of human freedom as an ongoing debate in the eighteenth century, which started with Hobbes and Bramhall, and continued with other philosophers or novelists, such as Anthony Collins and Samuel Clarke. The apparent contradiction between a mechanistic view of nature and human freedom appeared so hard to dissipate that it became for Kant an antinomy of pure reason, that is, a state of embarrassment where reason could not decide between two equally probable claims. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 532-546 (Ak.III, A 351-558, B 559-586). The polemic also rested on two different notions of freedom, one that was compatible with a mechanistic view of nature, and another which was not. Kramnick explains that for some philosophers, such as Hobbes, external causation of human action was not incompatible with freedom, if one agrees to see freedom as being the ability to do as one wills or desires without being prevented to act by some external factor. As Hobbes explains, a free agent is one "whose motion, or action is not hindered nor stopped" (qtd. in Kramnick 36). This definition of freedom differs sensibly from, for instance, the Kantian notion of freedom as being a pure spontaneity of the will.

⁴ Thomas S. Manganaro claims that while the Aristotelian problem of *Akrasia* had mostly disappeared in the philosophical reflections on morals in the eighteenth century, it was still problematized in novels. Although this is certainly the case, it does not ensue that the literary text was the only means through which to see the difficulties and the problems produced by the modern perspective. See Thomas S. Manganaro, *Against better Judgment*, 5-6. For instance, Rousseau and Kant were preoccupied by the presence in humans of a tendency to act contrary to what is represented as morally good, Kant imputing it to the influence of personal desire related to pleasure and pain, and Rousseau to a corruption of the heart occasioned by society and civilization. For her part, Nancy Armstrong argues convincingly about the role played by the novel regarding the shaping and diffusion of the modern conception of individualism. However, she maintains that while philosophers theorized the new modern subject, only novels presented the difficulties and aporia which arise from this conception, through narratives in which the world appears unable to respond to the subject's demands and desires as society rejects him/her. As she writes, "It was at this point that Enlightenment philosophy left off and fiction took over" (*How Novels Think* 5). As I will demonstrate in this dissertation, philosophers were aware of the alienation of the modern subject from the world, and while their attempts at reconciling them may sometimes appear unconvincing, it is misleading to suggest that they did not try to overcome this gap.

philosophical debates of the eighteenth century about the self and its alienation from the world, demonstrating that these novelists presented interesting solutions to these problems. My claim is therefore that the collaboration of novels to the clarification and solution of these philosophical problems was essential and that these difficulties could not have been explored with sufficient depth and clarity without the resource of the literary techniques provided by novels, and more specifically, the particular perspective taken by women writers on the questions of personal identity, alienation and reification.

The Role of Novels in the Philosophical Discussion of Alienation and Personal Identity

However difficult and as of yet undecided the question of the actual origins of the English novel is, it seems quite certain that the genre developed in Britain during the modern period and that it bears affinities with modern philosophy. While I will elaborate on the relationships between modern philosophy and the novel in chapter one, I summarize here briefly the debates regarding the origins of the genre in order to situate myself in relation to it. Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* is generally considered as a pioneer work within these debates. In his work, Watt argues that the novel genre was determined in large part by modern philosophy and empirical thought and that novels consequently sought realism and verisimilitude. His work has since been criticized for numerous reasons, even if it is nonetheless acknowledged as a foundational work. Watt's successors, such as Michael McKeon and J. Paul Hunter, have pointed to the narrowness of Watt's definition of novels, which does not encompass the diversity of eighteenth-century novels, especially romances, the absence of any references to earlier form of novels in France or Spain, or the lack of any mention concerning journals, magazines, print culture in general and their influence on the novel. Before them, John R. Richetti has criticized Watt and other critics

for what he deems to be their retrospective or teleological definition of the novel. For Richetti, this way of defining novels is overly selective, relying on works that resemble what we consider to be a novel today and neglecting all other forms of work that do not correspond to what the genre supposedly became. It has the result of ignoring numerous popular works produced in the eighteenth century, and of fortifying a sort of canon of great novels (to which Richetti seems averse). More recently, Leah Orr makes a similar criticism and undertakes to open the enquiry about the novel to all eighteenth-century printed works of fiction that can be found through multiple databases and online resources. Like Richetti, she rejects the idea of a linear development of the novel, and her intention is therefore to show the complexity and messiness of fiction in the eighteenth century, thus avoiding the so-called selective, elitist choice of certain novelists made by predecessors such as Watt. Finally, other critics, like Franco Moretti (most notably in “History of the Novel, Theory of the Novel”) assume, contrary to Watt, that the novel is not to be seen as a Western phenomenon at all and that it existed in other cultures as well. While acknowledging the value of these positions, I perceive Watt’s characterization of the novel as relevant and helpful, even as I am conscious of its limitations. Certainly, there were other forms of prose narrative very close to novels produced in this period, some of which extend beyond the borders of Britain. For my part, I limit my discussion to the Western novel. I adopt, something like Watt, a more formal analysis, one concentrated on the form of the novel, instead of on the material, social, and economic conditions of its emergence, as is often the case with recent critics such as Catherine Ingrassia or Rachael Scarborough King. My approach works from the assumption that a teleological perspective on novels should not be wholeheartedly discarded. Such an approach is, in fact, crucial, since one cannot study

novels without a definition of what it is, and this definition can only be drawn by references to examples of novels that are universally recognized as such. Even if I agree that the development of novels was not as linear as one might think it is, it does not mean that there were not general tendencies toward a general form, which became more and more refined and patent in later works of fiction. I also find it more constructive to organize and classify my object of study, to clarify its meaning and form, than to insist on its messiness and disorganization. The desire to include all sorts of printed works from the eighteenth century into the label of novel, as generous as it sounds, may risk finally obscuring our understanding of the term and dissolving the concept into nothingness.⁵

Of course, one should be cautious when talking about the “novel” in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. It has been justly remarked that the differences between the novel and other genres, such as the philosophical essay, were not very clear at the time and that their boundaries were, in fact, quite blurry. This was in part due to the uncertain status of the novel itself in relation to other genres such as “histories,” “romances,” and “biographies,” as well as the various genres through which philosophical thought was expressed.⁶ Because of this indeterminacy, some critics have chosen to ignore the formal and stylistic differences between the two disciplines. I contend that despite the floating demarcation that existed at the time between philosophical and literary texts, they

⁵ For more on this debate, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*; J.Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: the Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*; Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*; John J. Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson*; Leah Orr, *Novel Ventures*; Catherine Ingrassia, *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England*; Rachael Scarborough King, *Writing to the World: Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres*.

⁶ About the indeterminacy of the genre of the novel itself, at the end of the seventeenth century and at the beginning of the eighteenth century, see Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740*, 25-28. Jonathan Kramnick shows clear evidence of the confusion between philosophical texts and literary ones in the eighteenth century when he quotes both David Hume’s affirmation that his governing passion was a “love of literary fame” (11) and Samuel Richardson’s statement that he wrote “*instantaneous Descriptions and Reflections*” (11) of the workings of minds and hearts.

remained sufficiently different in form to be distinguished, notably when the novel became a more definite genre, that is, after 1740.

This dissertation, therefore, inquires into the novelistic form, examining the important effects on the reader of literary modes such as irony, heteroglossia, and concrete exemplification of moral and epistemological difficulties through character development and narration, and argues that these literary techniques provide ways, not possible in philosophical works, of expressing and problematizing ideas. My claim is that novels were a great addition to philosophy in the eighteenth century; they were able to convey, express, and exemplify philosophical problems in a more concrete and accessible manner. Literary techniques such as irony and free indirect speech have allowed novels to explore more acutely than philosophical texts certain moral problems, helping, for instance, the reader to access some inconsistencies and apparent irrationalities of behavior in human agents.⁷ While eighteenth-century philosophers also expressed serious doubts about the coherence of human actions and identity, and questioned the limits of human reason and understanding, the discursive and abstract form of their works was not as effective as novels in “convincing” and explaining fully to readers the full extent of these difficulties. Hence, the poetic form of literature serves as a powerful auxiliary to philosophy.

Admittedly, my position about literature’s complimentary contribution to philosophical texts in the exploration of some problems, is significantly indebted to Martha Nussbaum’s analysis of literary knowledge in *Love’s Knowledge*, where she refers explicitly to the inseparability of form and content in literary texts and vindicates

⁷ I concur here with Thomas S. Manganaro, who explains that because Enlightenment philosophers could not consider seriously a concept such as Akrasia, it became an important theme of novels. He also claims that some literary techniques, such as irony, were invented precisely to convey these contradictions of the will. See Thomas S. Manganaro, *Against Better Judgment*, 5.

literature's ability to stimulate the reader's emotions, leading him/her through a more complex and concrete understanding of human life and actions.⁸ According to her perspective, one could, for instance, probably separate John Locke's style from the content he expressed in his philosophical essays, and replace the words he used by others, similar or equivalent, without changing the meaning of the text. The same operation is, however, impossible to perform with a novel such as Frances Burney's *Cecilia*. In the latter case, changing the words would affect the meaning. One cannot separate the words chosen by Burney to describe the greedy and mean nature of Mr. Briggs, one of Cecilia's guardians in Burney's second novel, from the specific meaning they are meant to convey. Moreover, if Locke can explain logically and convince the reader that the identity of a person can disappear or be interrupted through a loss of consciousness, this explanation remains abstract, if not artificial, and not entirely convincing, until its truth is exemplified concretely in a fictional narrative, such as Burney's description of Cecilia's gradual fall into madness in *Cecilia; or Memoirs of an Heiress*. An examination of the possibilities offered by the novel form to express philosophical thoughts is therefore an important part of this dissertation.

Methodology: A Philosophical Perspective

This dissertation is centered around the works of three eighteenth-century women novelists: Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen. These women have been widely discussed and figure among the most famous eighteenth-century British women writers. My aim is not, therefore, in this dissertation, to repair some kind of historical neglect as to their literary worth. My ambition is rather to underline the engagement of

⁸ See Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 6-7, 29.

these eighteenth-century women novelists with Enlightenment philosophy, and their original contribution to the development of philosophical ideas about the self. This subject has not yet attracted much attention among scholars. What remains to be demonstrated is how these women novelists participated in the exposition and discussion of philosophical ideas, and more precisely, how they explored and problematized, through their novels, the modern conception of the self, while also offering solutions to the alienation it experiences from the “world,” understood both in a metaphysical and a social sense. Apart from Nancy Armstrong’s *Novel Minds*, which is not entirely centered around women novelists, and Karen Gevartz’s *Women, the Novel, and Natural Philosophy, 1660-1727*, studies about the relationships between eighteenth-century women’s novels and philosophical problems are not numerous. Although Gevartz’s and Armstrong’s works provide interesting perspectives on this subject, my analysis differs from them in many ways. First, contrary to them, I suggest that novels and philosophical essays are very different sorts of texts, because of their form and of the language they use. As I will explain more fully in chapter two, the philosophical use of language is not metaphorical and is intended to convey one univocal meaning. Its form is discursive and argumentative. Contrarily, the novel’s language is rich in literary figures, conveys different styles and forms of speech and its general form is narrative. While these literary critics seem to take for granted that novels can convey philosophical truth, I undertake to justify this cognitive claim with respect to novels. My understanding of Enlightenment philosophy is also very different from theirs. For instance, I do not present Enlightenment philosophy as promoting stability, consistency, and the continuity of the self, leaving to literary works the task to criticize and “destabilize” this

rational and systematic view, as Gevirtz, in particular, suggests.⁹ I hold that the isolation of the self, the impossibility to know others and the world, and the crisis about personal identity had already been discussed in philosophical works. My claim, however, is that novels went further in the exploration of these problems, offering interesting and original solutions. While this dissertation is concerned mainly by novels written by women, I do not suggest, as other critics do, that their gender may have influenced their understanding of philosophical problems. My intention is simply to reveal their philosophical contribution to the philosophical debates of their time and to explain their predilection for the novel form. Among the reasons that can explain women's choice of the novel to express philosophical views in the eighteenth century, I tend to prioritize aesthetic reasons over economic, political, or social ones. This aesthetic perspective is grounded in a definition of literature as primarily and essentially a "form of art."¹⁰ This definition has prompted me to investigate foremost the novel's aesthetic dimension and its relationship with epistemology and ethics. My perception of the novel as a work of art also prevents me from dissolving its particularity by mixing it with all sorts of literary forms of the same period, as numerous critics have tended to do.¹¹ Contrary to a dominant tendency in literary studies, I also prefer to consider the novel as a creation of an individual, instead as of the "product" of multiple forces emanating from one's environment, such as the emergence of a capitalist economy, the development of print culture, the postal system, and the rise of new political

⁹ See Karen B. Gevirtz, *Women, the Novel, and Philosophy*, 34-35.

¹⁰ See Peter Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, 16.

¹¹ Eighteenth-century literary scholars such as John J. Richetti, J. Paul Hunter, and Leah Orr, include increasingly different forms of literary print into the study of the early novel, under the pretext of the indeterminacy of the genre at the time and following an egalitarian and generous impulse that can unfortunately sometimes lead to confusion as to what the novel actually is. Even if the early novel was not as clearly defined as one might hope, the efforts toward a broad definition of the term seems necessary, if one needs to say something meaningful and coherent about it.

structures. These various contextual perspectives are indeed valuable, but they at times risk obliterating the text itself and its author.¹² In a sense, this dissertation is not, in the positivist sense, a historical study of the various economic, social, political, and cultural components of the context in which eighteenth-century women's novels appeared, and of all the varieties of print, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, open letters, and others, however neglected they are today, that may have flourished in this period. It is not an attempt at recovering forgotten texts, authors, or sources, or at shedding new light on the relationships of novels with some distinctive features of the eighteenth-century cultural environment, such as the stock market, the development of print, or new forms of public entertainment. My aim is not to perform some kind of social criticism, by pointing, for instance, at gender discrimination or racism in Enlightenment philosophy or in the novels of the period. I do not underestimate the value of the scholarship that does this work, but since such studies are now dominant in the field of literary studies, I have chosen to take a perspective in which the novel is viewed as a primarily formal and aesthetical medium; this allows me to privilege an approach more centered on the texts themselves. Therefore, I avoid to anchor my work in what literary studies often label "theory," a concept that generally encompasses a strictly postmodern perspective and draws on authors such as Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida, and their contemporary heirs. As opposed to these theorists, all of whom tend, however

¹² Of course, literary works are produced in a specific historical context and their meanings are partially determined by this context. It is consequently very interesting to investigate the relationships between eighteenth-century literary works and the social, economic, and political structures that existed at the same time. This does not mean, however, that a literary text is the mirror of its context or that this context is the only thing that produces it. I maintain that a significant part of the meaning and the style of a literary text is genuine, as it is the creation of an independent and creative individual, and that it can be analyzed as such. Therefore, my position is more aligned with eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theories of genius, than with the more recent Marxist tendency to focus on material conditions and economics. This latter tendency is, however, a dominant force in scholarship, beginning with works as early as Michael McKeon's *Origins of the English Novel* (1987) to the recent work from Rachael Scarborough King, *Writing to the World* (2018).

differently, toward a vision of the text as the product of external discourses, political forces, or economical interests, I choose to adopt what I call a “philosophical approach,” using the term “philosophical” in a broad sense, with no reference to one particular philosophy. This approach leads to a study of the content of texts in and of themselves.

I must explain briefly what I mean by a “philosophical approach.” It is related to the original sense of philosophy, as it was formulated by the first philosophers. According to Plato and Aristotle, a philosophical *stance* is one propelled by astonishment or wonder. In *Theaetetus*, Socrates declares that Theaetetus has a philosophical attitude because he has the capacity to be astonished by things that look familiar and evident to others: “I see, my dear Theaetetus that Theodorus had a true insight into your nature when he said that you were a philosopher, for wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder” (*Theaetetus* 69 155b). At the beginning of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that wonder has been the condition of philosophy since its beginning, “For, now and at first, men began to philosophize through wonder;” (*Metaphysics*, 5, 1, 982 b).

Wonder transforms an ordinary thing, unquestioned and unheeded before, into a puzzling thing, a question. It produces a distance between the perceiver or thinker and the object of his/her perception, enabling the observer to put aside his/her ordinary beliefs about a certain thing and to see it anew, in “itself.” This stance pleads for an elimination of all standpoints or theoretical assumptions about an object. It is Socratic, because it implies an acute awareness of our own personal ignorance and of the dangers of false dogmatic knowledge. This perspective can be found in philosophers who, like Descartes and Husserl, although very distant chronologically, insist on seeing philosophical inquiry as a process of radical doubt about all previous beliefs that one may have had about things, or as a

deliberate attempt to put momentarily into parenthesis (*epochè*) what one knows about the phenomenon considered.¹³ This philosophical perspective also implies a will to seize the object totally, in order to reveal its essence or being. In other words, philosophy is interested by what a thing is generally and universally; it is, as Aristotle once said, “the science which speculates being so far as being” (*Metaphysics* 85). This definition suggests that philosophy explores its object of study universally, in all its aspects, in an attempt to reach its *essence* or *ousia*. Contrary to philosophy, the other disciplines do not consider “being universally so far as being” (Aristotle *Metaphysics* 85), but they cut off and analyze “a certain part of it (...) which is *accidental* to this part” (85). For instance, if the object studied is humanity, biology will concentrate only on its biological aspects, while psychology will consider only its mental and psychological features. Contrarily, a philosophical inquiry into human beings will encompass all these aspects and tend to define the universal essence of humans, not as members of society, economic agents, or psychological subjects, *but as humans*. It follows that if any given psychological, political, or social approach about an object is indisputably interesting, it remains nonetheless incomplete, because it does not aim to seize the object totally and completely *as it is* and fails to grasp what is essential to its being. Moreover, one might say that particular approaches often suffer from biases, such as a fixed conception of the psyche or of the political and the social, ones that are not open to debate and are taken as facts, *when in fact they are not*. A philosophical approach appears therefore as an attempt to put into parenthesis all the potential assumptions we may have about the object, and to refuse to

¹³ One can find expressions of the philosophical necessity to doubt all our previous conceptions about objects and the world in René Descartes, *Méditations métaphysiques*, 65, and in Edmund Husserl, *Ideas to a Pure Phenomenology and to Phenomenological Philosophy*, 60-61.

apprehend it only from one standpoint or to consider only one aspect of it. Thence, the philosophical stance is universal because it views its object in itself, or in all its aspects, while also attempting to be “objective” and impartial, because it deliberately avoids any subjective assumptions as to its nature and value.¹⁴

This universal stance and the necessity to doubt our own presuppositions can appear naïve to any thinker who, following Nietzsche, reduces every philosophical proposition to the point of view of the ones who claim it. Objectivity and universality are therefore to be viewed with suspicion and claims to them must acknowledge relations of power and a will to dominate.¹⁵ I readily admit that it is hard to disengage ourselves from our own bias and prejudice, and, surely, we often fail in the attempt. However, what philosophy has aimed at from its inception is to set impartiality and universality as its goal and to develop multiple techniques to check our own prejudices and to advance toward this goal. In this sense, objectivity and universality are *epistemic duties* instead of actual *realities*; they are an ideal to attain rather than a fact one could determine. David Hume warned his readers about the

¹⁴ The term objectivity itself is a modern term and is not used by Greek philosophers. However, the idea of a disengagement of the subject from his/her own prejudices and preferences, to attain the truth about what something is, was already present in the earliest of Greek philosophy, even in the presocratic era, where, for instance, Heraclitus would pretend that it is the *Logos* who speaks and not himself, prefiguring Socrates’ assertion in the *Gorgias* that it is not him but philosophy itself that Callicles must refute. See Heraclitus, *The Complete Fragments*, fragment no.118, 116, and Plato, *Gorgias*, 61. Contrary to what Peter Galison and Lorraine Daston have argued, objectivity has always had a moral component as it referred to the proper attitude one should have to attain the truth, seen as a “good.” On the moral aspect of objectivity, see Galison and Daston, *The Image of Objectivity*, 81-82. Objectivity being the opposite of subjectivity, these two related terms are contemporary to the famous “subjective turn” of the early modern period, evoked in this introduction.

¹⁵ For Nietzsche, the genealogy of morality seeks to reveal what is, supposedly, really at stake behind so-called universal moral values such as compassion and pity. The skepticism and suspicion that accompanies this method considers morality “as symptom, as mask, as tartuffery, as sickness, as misunderstanding” (Nietzsche *On the Genealogy of Morals* 7-8), that is, as a weapon in the hands of people who want to have power over others. Foucault was inspired by this methodology when he described his own conception of genealogy as another form of historical inquiry that uncovers more unheeded and hidden causes behind historical phenomena than those conventionally held responsible for them, such as “the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, (...) their spirit of competition” (Foucault *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* 8).

impossibility to derive a duty from a fact. Following his lead, Immanuel Kant clearly stated that the obligation to obey the moral law could not be derived from, and therefore refuted by the actual lack of morality in humans. If they are right, one could not argue that impartiality and universality are not to be desired and sought after as epistemic virtues based on the actual lack of these qualities in human knowledge. However, some might suggest that if objectivity is a moral ideal, then it is only a subjective construct designed to enforce one's power, as Nietzsche and his contemporary followers would assume.¹⁶ While I do not wish, here, to enter into a lengthy philosophical discussion on the topic of objectivity, I would only observe that the question of the objectivity of morality is still something over which philosophers debate.¹⁷ Therefore, one cannot simply infer that the existence of epistemic virtues transform objectivity into a mere subjective construct. As Charles Taylor explains in *Sources of the Self*, one cannot avoid situating himself among "goods," understood as the goals one wants to reach in order to live the best of life.¹⁸

¹⁶ Every author who applies a genealogical method is, to a certain extent, working within a Nietzschean framework. Foucault borrowed the method from Nietzsche, even though he modified some of its aspects. Every historian of literature or science who accepts these authors' premises, will necessarily think, as Galison and Daston do, that "objectivity" is a discourse, a perspective, constructed by dominant groups, tainted with moral values, and aimed at subjecting others. See Peter Galison and Lorraine Daston, *The Image of Objectivity*, 81-82.

¹⁷ There is an ongoing debate in philosophy concerning the ontological and epistemological status of moral judgments. The anti-realists claim that moral judgments do not refer to facts and that they remain mere subjective opinions. For them, morality cannot be reckoned as a form of knowledge because of its lack of universality and objectivity. The realists, for their part, consider moral judgments to be true or false like any factual proposition, and they claim that there can be a knowledge of morals. They defend, in short, moral cognitivism. There are more realists than anti-realists in philosophy, but each current is divided in different tendencies. The moral realists, for instance, are divided in three sub-groups, sharing varying theses about realism: the semantic thesis, the metaphysical thesis, and the alethic thesis. Important moral realists include Jonathan Dancy, Philippa Foot, Thomas Nagel, R.H. Hare, Christine Korsgaard, G.E. Moore, Derek Parfit, Michael Huemer.

¹⁸ As Charles Taylor argues in *Sources of the Self*, our relation to the good requires a "sense of where we stand in relation" to this good (42). This question is far from being indifferent, according to him, because it represents "one of the most basic aspirations of human beings, the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value" (42). For him, without an aspiration toward the good and a reflection as to where we stand in relation to it, there can be no human agency. He asks, "how can it be otherwise, once we see that this orientation in relation to the good is essential to being a functional human agent?" (42).

Likewise, a philosopher, a scientist, or a critic must develop some qualities, or virtues, if s/he wants to attain his/her greatest goal: the truth. To abandon these virtues is to renounce truth altogether. As to the question of the constructed and therefore illusory and deceitful nature of “objectivity,” not only does it fall, like any relativism, under the logical contradictions that Plato has already explained in *Theaetetus*,¹⁹ but it is also based in a perspective that is highly questionable. To say that our relations to the world are always distorted and mediated through a structure or system or through the effects of dominant ideological discourses and can never therefore be immediate, genuine, and “real” is a perspective that is not obvious or uncontested. For instance, the whole current of phenomenology at the beginning of the twentieth century can be seen as an important attempt to go back to our original, unmediated relationships with phenomena, before we impose on them our grids or conceptualities.²⁰ In this dissertation, I take a phenomenological approach to literary texts. Consequently, I preconize a form of phenomenological reduction through which literary texts are apprehended in themselves, *as literary texts*, instead of as a “construct” expressing power relations, psychoanalytic schemas, class struggles, or gender biases. All these perspectives about literary texts can

¹⁹ See Plato, *Theaetetus*, 204.

²⁰ Phenomenology (from the Greek φαινόμενον / *phainómenon*) denotes “what appears” and is a school of thought inaugurated by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its aim was to transform philosophy into an empirical discipline. Its method demands an apprehension of reality as it meets us in common natural experience. Philosophy is therefore seen as the systematic study and analysis of lived experience and of consciousness, which are at the foundation of our perception of ourselves and of the world. As Husserl states, phenomenology wants to rid itself of all previous theory of knowledge in order to go to the thing in itself, as it appears, because “seeing” is not something that can be demonstrated and deduced. To see or listen to phenomena implies, therefore, what he calls a phenomenological reduction. About the phenomenological method, see Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* and *Cartesian Meditations*. After Husserl, other philosophers, such as Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Lévinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Paul Ricoeur claimed to be part of the phenomenologist tradition, while developing their own specific version of phenomenology.

be illuminating, but I fear that they are also at times reductive.²¹ Therefore, I do not intend to find in literary texts some signs of a theory or a concept that I have already submitted to as truth; my intention is to examine the texts in themselves, as part of a “world” that we partake in as humans.²²

A Defense of the Enlightenment

This dissertation explores how eighteenth-century British novels written by women contributed significantly to the philosophical debates that characterized the eighteenth century, a period often referred to as “Enlightenment.” Against the general disrepute cast upon this unfortunate era by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and some of their followers in contemporary literary criticism, I contend that this period inaugurated rich and unprecedented reflections about the self and its relations to others and the world, which still influence greatly how we represent human consciousness and action today.²³ Since Adorno and Horkheimer are the original impulse

²¹ To read a text from the particular perspective of a certain theory means that the text itself is only a manifestation or an instance of an overall scheme of things or of a structure, and therefore it is never regarded as something interesting in itself. The literary quality of the text is often disregarded or dismissed as uninteresting. I therefore agree with Peter Lamarque that specific theoretical approaches to literature can be reductive and deny the autonomy of literature. As he explains, “When literary works are approached with a general all-embracing theory in hand, such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism, linguistics, or radical politics it is all too easy to reduce the works to mere instances of a wider class of phenomena which themselves possess no distinct literary qualities” (Lamarque 11).

²² I am referring here to Hannah Arendt’s interesting position in *The Human Condition*, where she explains that the modern and contemporary way of thinking have progressively alienated humans from the world. This alienation from the world is made through Cartesian doubt and its aim at an Archimedes point, outside our world, and its translation of the world into universal mathematical formulas. Isolated and alienated from their common world, humans have lost the capacity to relate to their world and to communicate with each other about it in meaningful ways. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 395. I claim that works of fiction do not alienate us from the world. On the contrary, they reconnect humans with others and with the world because fiction speaks about this common world that we, as readers, share with the characters and the narrators, that is, a world experienced through our senses, reflections and emotions.

²³ It is quite common today in human sciences and in literary studies—although not in philosophy—to reject wholeheartedly Enlightenment philosophy and ideas. The bad reputation of the Enlightenment has its origin in Max Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, in 1944. Michel Foucault, for his part, contributed to the demonization of the modern period with works such as *Surveiller et Punir* and *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* in which he reads modern inventions such as prisons, madhouses as offering multiple

of the anti-*Aufklärung* movement, I must give to their arguments some attention. According to them, the Enlightenment's confidence in the power of reason and in the continuous progress of knowledge, and its belief that reason is a vector of emancipation and freedom, have produced the reverse of what it aimed at, that is, the domination of nature and of humans through the rational constraints produced by science, technology, the liberal state, and a bourgeois economy. While combating, as sources of enslavement, old superstitions, religions, and traditions, Enlightenment philosophers were in fact creating new myths through which other forms of enslavement and domination were rendered possible. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, philosophers and scientists of this era exerted as much violence and showed a similar will to dominate and control than the ancient gods of Greece, the Christian priests, or any other ancient political or spiritual leaders. Abstraction and universality, which are important epistemological and ethical concepts of the Enlightenment, are also important targets of Horkheimer and Adorno's critique. According to them, Enlightenment philosophy used abstraction and universality to efface the differences between individuals, groups, and cultures, negating the diversity of nature and

techniques of discipline and control. Postcolonial studies pursue the same inimical intent, transforming Enlightenment's ideals of reason, universality, and cosmopolitanism into instruments of Western domination over colonized people from other regions and cultures. While I recognize how these authors contributed to problematize and question certain general and naïve assumptions of Enlightenment philosophers regarding progress, freedom, or the universality of mankind, I think they tend to discard too rapidly and rather radically all that is genuinely progressist, fecund, useful, and revolutionary in Eighteenth-century culture and philosophy. On this subject, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, and Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. Their harsh criticism toward a century that has promoted wonderful humanist goals such as the defense of natural human rights, the realization of intellectual and political autonomy through critical thinking, the diffusion of knowledge, religious and political tolerance appears puzzling, even if some aspects of the Enlightenment are certainly to be criticized. I agree that Enlightenment philosophy has certainly not met all its promises regarding the emancipation of mankind and has been blind about some forms of discrimination and exploitation which happened before its eyes. However, it has helped to forge the critical tools with which we can still denounce today various forms of tyranny and unjustified violence exerted against humans. For this only reason, it seems impossible to condemn it entirely. My position is that the Enlightenment should be revalorized and reclaimed as an important and meaningful moment of intellectual history.

of humans under universal laws, and producing a dreadful uniformization of humans, in an attempt to control them. Most of all, Adorno and Horkheimer denounce the relationships established in the Enlightenment between knowledge and power, a key-concept within the postcolonial field. For them, the development of reason, knowledge, and the scientific method enabled eighteenth-century philosophers and scientists to gain a more effective power over nature and humans. Adorno and Horkheimer's interpretation of Francis Bacon's enthusiasm toward knowledge reflects their misogyny. Francis Bacon's genuine enthusiasm is translated by them into a rhetoric of power-knowledge where knowledge is presented as having "no limits, either in its enslavement of creation or in its deference to worldly masters" (2). The "worldly masters" to which they refer are, from a purely Marxist perspective, the "bourgeois economy" (2), its "factories" (2), and "the battlefield" (2).

Combining Nietzsche's genealogy and Marx's critic of ideology,²⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer's conception of Enlightenment offers a perspective which, however interesting, is not without problems. I claim that it offers a simplistic and reductive view of an intellectual configuration that is eminently complex. To assert, without sufficient proof or arguments, that totalitarianism, racism, economic oppression, and colonialism are directly caused by reason, the scientific method, rationalism, and Enlightenment philosophical theories, seems rather doubtful and simplistic. This grand assertion is itself supported by a grand mythical narrative according to which European progress is in fact a

²⁴ This double characterization points at these authors' shared – largely uncontested – belief in the truth of the Marxist analysis of human history as the result of class struggles, in the division of society into a superstructure and an infrastructure, and in the concomitant belief that the sciences, the arts, and philosophy are mere ideological inventions that support the dominant class's oppression. This interpretation is very rarely criticized and somehow taken for granted. They also seem to share an unshaken Nietzschean conviction that the philosophical tradition has erred in its valorization of logic and reason over instincts, and they partake of Nietzsche's view that all system of thoughts or values are a product of the will to power. While these are philosophical hypothesis which aim at a probable interpretation of humans, society, and history, they should not be accepted as absolute truth without any critical reflection.

gradual regression into barbarity, a romantic schema that has its roots in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.²⁵ This narrative is not truer nor better grounded than the narrative it is supposed to challenge: the belief in the ongoing progress of mankind. One can find historical events to support one or the other.²⁶ However, apart from replacing one myth (progress) by another (decline), Adorno and Horkheimer's error is to attach a power of causation to abstract phenomena like "Enlightenment," "knowledge," "progress," "the mathematical method," as if these universal concepts could directly produce singular situations of oppression. Some individuals may, of course, oppress others through the means of knowledge or in the name of progress, but neither reason nor progress seem here to blame, because good deeds and emancipating gestures can be also achieved through an adherence to these same concepts. However, even if Enlightenment philosophers were often blind to some inequalities and situations of oppressions which occurred in their own time, it is also true that Enlightenment criticism provided humankind with important concepts through which all inequalities, types of domination, and undeserved privileges would be later denounced and combated. If, according to Kant, the motto of Enlightenment is, "*Sapere aude!*" (*What is Enlightenment* 17), which means, "Have the courage to make use of your own intellect!" (17), then the Enlightenment appears, in this light, as "the age

²⁵ Rousseau criticizes many of the prominent values of the Enlightenment in works such as the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* and the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*. In these works, he presents the development of the arts and sciences since the Renaissance as means of enslavement of humans and nature, causing the corruption of the human heart and the loss of freedom. He simply reverses the Enlightenment narrative of progress into a narrative of decline and valorizes the view of a bare state of nature over one of a corrupt civilization.

²⁶ One should be prudent when making such sweeping readings of human history. While I have no objection to attempts at making sense of the global succession of events that make up human history, I believe we must be careful not to attribute to it exactitude or certainty, because these readings remain "hypotheses" that can always be opposed by other perspectives. The reading that views modernity as defined by decline can posit as proof the deterioration of the environment, colonization, governmental bureaucratic practices, or electronic tracking of individuals, while the reading that views modernity as governed by "progress" can be supported by the disappearance of mortal diseases, an increase in longevity and material comfort, a progress in human rights and equality, or by quicker means of transportation and communication.

of criticism,” where humans are invited to doubt any opinions and beliefs that are not grounded in solid reason. Critical in its essence, the Enlightenment spirit favours doubt, freedom of thought, and autonomy, and is therefore far less prone to enforcing “ideologies” on people than some of today’s dominant anti-Enlightenment currents. After all, without the Enlightenment philosophers, there would have been no critique of colonialism. It is not surprising then if Kant, a renowned eighteenth-century philosopher, was very averse to colonialism and advocated for a cosmopolitan right according to which every citizen of the world could be free to go anywhere and be protected by cosmopolitan laws.²⁷

The negative association made by Horkheimer and Adorno between power and knowledge, which they deem characteristic of modern science and philosophy, presupposes two questionable assumptions: first, that control and power are intrinsically bad, and second, that knowledge has not always been a form of power. Like Aristotle and Plato, I certainly think that knowledge can be pursued disinterestedly. However, I recognize that knowledge can also be pursued to obtain some sort of gain or advantage in terms of control or power. The practical skills gained through disciplines like rhetoric, medicine, architecture, agriculture, engineering, and others seem to fall onto the latter category. One cannot cure a patient without attempting to acquire a certain degree of control and power over his/her body and what threatens it, such as viruses, cancer cells, and bacteria. What distinguishes the Enlightenment and the new method of science with ancient forms of knowledge is that knowledge has become suddenly much more effective

²⁷ For Kant, cosmopolitan laws are seen as a condition for the establishment of peace among humans and they are, thus, an important part of his program toward perpetual peace. According to these laws, humans should be free to go visit other parts of the world without being imprisoned, tortured, or enslaved. On the other hand, this right to visit is not a right to conquer and it must be limited to peaceful interactions with the inhabitants. Kant’s words against the institution of slavery in America, Africa, and the West Indies are very harsh, seeing it as both inhuman and useless, bringing more harm than benefits for the conquerors themselves. See Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: a Philosophical Sketch*, 82-84 (Ak. 8, 358-360).

and powerful. Therefore, if modern knowledge, through this efficiency, can exert greater control on humans and nature, it can also provide humans with better means of emancipation. For instance, modern science has gained, compared with ancient modes of medical practice, more power over formerly lethal diseases through the use of vaccines, advanced surgery, and new medicines. This power has helped to emancipate humans from their past subjugation to all sort of potentially fatal sicknesses that would have imposed important constraints upon their life. That is why the Enlightenment promise of emancipation cannot be entirely dismissed as false. One cannot contradict the fact that more and more humans are educated, and that human knowledge has increased. It is also difficult to deny the growing importance placed since the eighteenth-century on human rights and the betterment of the general conditions of human life.

However, what seems to be the most important point regarding this controversy about the value of the Enlightenment is the questionable image of the era as being characterized by a “triumphant” or overconfident attitude toward the power of reason and human knowledge. In fact, what the modern and Enlightenment philosophers encountered along their path toward knowledge was, more often than not, doubt, uncertainty, limitation, and scepticism. In this regard, my claim is that the age of Enlightenment was principally an *age of doubt* where philosophers experienced the limits of human understanding and criticized the falsity of metaphysical systems, as well as the preposterous ambition of an unrestrained reason. It was an era where the very possibility of a total and certain knowledge of the world and of humans was significantly shaken.²⁸ What I want to claim,

²⁸ Despite his confidence in the power of human knowledge, René Descartes, one of the founders of modern thought, begins his metaphysical inquiry by expressing universal doubt about human knowledge. He only succeeds to rescue that knowledge from complete scepticism by positing a supreme being, God, who acts as

therefore, is that the Enlightenment was a period of significant philosophical doubt regarding conceptions of the self, the world, and human agency. Such doubt was instigated by important changes in the philosophical approach to reality, engendering problems that continue to haunt us today.

The Subjective Turn in the Modern Conception of the Self

The seventeenth century inaugurated a change in the traditional conception of the self. This change brought about difficulties and an impulse to solve them, which then determined much eighteenth-century philosophical reflection. In my dissertation, I call this fundamental change in the conception of the self and the world, along with the difficulties that arose from it, “the modern predicament,” referring more precisely to the separation of the self, conceived as a thinking subject, from the world, conceived as its opposite, a mere material object. This philosophical revolution is often presented as a turn “inward,” where the source of knowledge, the criteria of truth and of the moral good is situated in the human mind, rather than derived from external sources such as Plato’s Ideas

a guarantee of human’s capacity to arrive at truth concerning the world. This final appeal to God is nonetheless a definite admission of human’s finitude. In his *Essay Concerning human Understanding*, John Locke describes his ambition rather humbly as the attempt to distinguish what we can know with certainty from what remains out of reach using our cognitive powers. According to him, his inquiry is “Useful to know the extent of our comprehension. If by this inquiry into the nature of the understanding, I can discover the powers thereof; how far they reach; to what things they are in any degree proportionate; and where they fail us, I suppose it may be of use to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension; to stop when it is at the utmost extent of its tether; and to sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities” (5). One cannot find a better appeal to Socratic “learned ignorance” than Locke’s statement about the wisdom of accepting our ignorance concerning matters that are out of our reach. David Hume, in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, seems preoccupied with destroying human confidence in its capacity to know the world and its own self, reducing all our knowledge about matters of facts to subjective beliefs based on customs and habits, while Kant, attempting to dodge Hume’s skepticism, digs even farther into the abyss of human limitation, revealing that our knowledge is in fact restricted to phenomenon construed with our own concepts (categories), leaving the things in themselves utterly unknown. See René Descartes, *Méditations métaphysiques*; John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*; and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*.

or God's will.²⁹ As they located the source of truth in inner self, modern and Enlightenment philosophers felt the need to investigate the capacities of the human mind. For important philosophers like John Locke, this investigation had not yet been undertaken seriously. As he states in the opening lines of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the understanding has been busy attempting to know the things outside. It has never turned its knowing powers on itself. He therefore believes that humans should, once and for all, undertake to turn their "eyes" inward and investigate their own understanding. As he writes, "The understanding, like the eye, whilst it makes us see and perceive all other things, takes no notice of itself; and it requires an art and pains to set it at a distance, and make it its own object" (4). In view, this enquiry promises to bring interesting benefits. The same project of investigation animates David Hume and Immanuel Kant, two other ambitious Enlightenment philosophers, who strove to disclose the source and the extent of human knowledge, through an enquiry into the human mind. This turn inward totally inverted the Greek and medieval categories of "subject" and "object." This radical change regarding our understanding of the notions of subject and object was brilliantly thematized by Martin Heidegger in *What Is a Thing* and in *Being and Truth*.³⁰ According to him, the self or the "I", which is, according to Descartes, the only thing that cannot be doubted and

²⁹ Charles Taylor's influential work, *Sources of the Self* (1989), provides clear and illuminating explanations about the change that occurs in the modern era in the representation of the self. Its main thesis is that the common notion of a subject with inner ideas and emotions, which are opposed to external objects and actions, is characteristic of the modern conception of the self, as developed in the West. For him, modernity is characterized by a movement inward that was influenced by Plato's requirement of reason for self-mastery and Augustine's inner quest for God. However, according to him, it is Descartes who transformed a mere tendency into a radical change of perspective by retrieving the self from its participation in a transcendent cosmic order and making it the locus of truth and knowledge. Accordingly, Taylor describes Descartes' thought as "epoch-making" (143). Following Galilean science, knowledge is seen by Descartes as "representational" (144) and the representations that arise from the self become the new criteria of "evidence" (144). Knowledge is no longer something we "find" (144), but "something we build" (144).

³⁰ For a complete analysis of this historical shift concerning the understanding of the correlated notions of subject and object in the modern period, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Truth*, 32-35.

is, therefore, the criteria of truth, is perceived in the modern period as a “subject.” The term subject is the English translation of the Greek term *Hypokeimenon*, which denotes what stands underneath and bears qualities or accidents. To put it differently, the subject is a thing which is “at hand.” Before Descartes, the self was not a subject. The term subject applied only to physical beings of the world: they were all “subjects,” that is, bearers of qualities. On the contrary, what were designated as objects were the representations and ideas in the mind, which were “opposed to us in mere thought” (Heidegger 35). The object was, therefore, the name for an idea or image in the mind, but it did not capture what was perceived outside the mind. In positing the I or self who doubts as the sole undoubtable thing, the first certitude and the criteria of truth, Descartes instituted the self as the only subject, while he transformed all the former “subjects” given to us in the outer world into “representations,” “ideas” in the mind, that is, into “objects.” This shift in the representation of the self helped to shape the world into a mathematical frame, nature being thus represented through the subject’s mathematical concepts. The outcome of this subjectivation of knowledge was an increase in its efficiency and ability to control bodies and nature, which brought good, as well as bad, consequences. Another outcome of the self viewed as a subject was the development of liberal individualism, of the ideal of autonomy and the search for individual self-expression, which are key marks of modern culture.³¹

³¹ Although some eminent eighteenth-century literary scholars, such as Jonathan Kramnick, have challenged the interpretation according to which modern philosophy is principally characterized by a move “inward” or a subjective turn (as Martin Heidegger and Charles Taylor have convincingly demonstrated) I don’t think it can be reasonably doubted, when one considers what is at stake in this radical transformation. The impulse to determine the subject by external causes, which can indeed be found in philosophers like Hobbes or Hume, presupposes the inner/outer distinction or the subject/object distinction introduced by modern philosophy. To say that a human agent is determined by external causes and not by his own free will or mind is a position that already accepts the idea of a separation between the interiority of the mind or will as part of the subject and the exteriority of its body or of the physical world as object. The impulse to bind the subject to external causes stems from the awareness of its separation and isolation from the external world. Even if empiricism

However, this transformation of the self into a subject and of the world into an object in the mind brought about certain problems. In this new modern epistemological framework, based on the subject and its representations, the “world” and “other people” could appear unreal or doubtful, since they were merely representations or sensations in the subject. If it could be proven that they existed outside the human mind and if they did, it was never certain that they were identical to our representations of them. This perspective tends therefore to isolate the self from the world and from other humans and cast a legitimate doubt on the certainty and accuracy of human knowledge. Instead of being integrated into the world, the self, understood as a “subject,” feels radically separated from everything; imprisoned in its thoughts, representations, or ideas, it lacks the certitude of its own unity or continuity. Being envisioned by others as an “object,” the self also runs the risk of being reified and reduced to other’s representations of it or to names to which it does not correspond.

In the eighteenth century, the isolation and reification of the self gave way to a general feeling of alienation that pervaded late seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century culture. By “alienation,” I mean a growing feeling of dispossession and estrangement from the world and others. Isolated and reified through the perceptions of others, the self could ultimately dissolve or disappear under a succession of various interpretations or occurrences. I claim that this sentiment of alienation was a central theme in eighteenth-century novels, particularly those written by women. Of course, philosophers had been

tried to tie the subject to the outside world by positing experience as the source of our sensations and representations, it nevertheless made the subject’s sensations and ideas, as well as the combinations and associations made of them in the mind, the basis of knowledge and the sole object of philosophical enquiry. The passage from Locke’s *Essay* cited earlier in the introduction makes an eloquent case for this. For more about J. Kramnik’s position about “external causes” in the modern philosophy of action, see the first chapter of *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson*, 27-60.

aware of this problem, and the great figures of empiricism, such as Locke and Hume, had tried to reconnect the self with the world, without the help of a Cartesian *Deus ex machina*. They tried to replace God by experience. According to the empiricist tradition, nothing happens in the self that has not its origin in the outside world, which is the source of our sensations, ideas, passions, and beliefs. However, as I will demonstrate in chapter three, they never truly succeeded in their attempts to bind the subject to the external world by causal relations. The world remains external and out of reach because the ideas and the sensations which occur in the mind differ from their supposed external source, and because human knowledge of the world is grounded on subjective assumptions regarding putative relations of causation between objects.³² The world therefore seemed to recede into an unreachable zone, so as to become, for a philosopher like Kant, unknowable in itself, and only attainable as it “appears” to us: a phenomenon constructed by our own faculties.³³ Certainty about the nature of the self was also shaken. The self was elusive; it evaded, for various philosophers of this era, the power of thought.³⁴ Philosophical investigations into the unity and constancy of the self as an enduring substance brought similarly mitigated results. For instance, in defining the self as the possession of consciousness, Locke remained aware of the possibility of a dispossession and of a discontinuity of the self through a temporary loss of consciousness, whether it be through drunkenness, madness or

³² I refer here to philosophical positions developed by John Locke in an *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and by David Hume in the *Treatise of Human Nature*. A more detailed explanation of their skeptical position regarding human knowledge can be found in chapter three, 147-154.

³³ Kant’s solution for the doubts formulated by David Hume resulted in the renouement of a knowledge of things as they are and its replacement by a knowledge of things as they appear to us through the forms of our intuition, space, and time, and the categories of our understanding. What he calls the Copernican revolution amounts precisely to the subsequent conclusion that “we can cognize of things a priori only what we ourselves have put into them” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 111).

³⁴ For more on the attempts by eighteenth-century philosophers to determine the nature of the self and its constancy through time, see chapter three, 147-154.

sleep, while Hume, more radically, characterized the idea of a substantial, enduring self, as an illusion produced by the imagination. For him, all we can grasp of the self is a multiplicity of successive ideas, a “bundle or collection of different perceptions” (*Treatise* 134). Enlightenment skepticism also extended to the relationships between the self and others. While the isolation of the subject seemed to have separated it definitely from others, who appeared as “objects” and were therefore mere “representations” in one’s mind, authors such as Francis Hutcheson and Lord Shaftesbury developed theories about the existence in subjects of “a public sense” or of “natural affections” through which “the observation of the happiness of others is made the necessary occasion of pleasure, and their misery the occasion of pain to the observer” (Hutcheson 14). According to these philosophers, humans possess some sort of moral feeling through which they are connected to others. The general feeling of sympathy in Hume and Smith’s system of morals fulfills a similar function, since it enables one to feel the pain or joy of another, as if it is its own. Hume even compares sympathy with an inner instrument that each human possesses, and which can vibrate in unison with that of others “so that all the affections readily pass from one person to the other” (*Treatise* 294). Even if it tends to create bonds with other humans, sympathy remains subjective; as an effort of the imagination, it can never reveal exactly what another feels. It reflects our perception of their feelings, but it may not correspond exactly to what they are.

The Affinities Between Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe and Jane Austen

In my dissertation, I have chosen to examine the works of three particular eighteenth-century British women novelists: Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen. This decision is based, first, on the aesthetical qualities of their novels, which, in

my view, situate them as somewhat “canonical.” Secondly, my choice reflects Jane Austen’s own sense of affinity with Radcliffe and Burney, as it is revealed in *Northanger Abbey*. In an important passage from the novel, Austen defends the quality of novels against their detractors. She mentions, as examples of novelistic excellence, three novels by eighteenth-century women authors: *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, by Frances Burney, and *Belinda*, by Maria Edgeworth.³⁵ The mere mention of two novels by Burney speaks to Austen’s belief in her importance. One must, of course, acknowledge that *Northanger Abbey* is a parody of Gothic novels, notably those written by Ann Radcliffe, whose works are avidly read and heavily commented upon by Austen’s protagonist, Catherine Morland, and her friend, Isabella Thorpe. Given that a parody is often meant as an homage, one can surmise that Austen is willing to situate herself within a tradition of eminent predecessors and contemporaries like Radcliffe, as well as Burney and Edgeworth. Together, they seem to constitute for her a tradition of women novelists of great talent with which she wants to be associated. This dissertation attempts to interrogate this affiliation. My hypothesis is that the works of Burney, Radcliffe, and Austen, despite their differences, are connected through their shared interest in philosophical problems regarding the self, notably its isolation from the world and other humans, and through their shared attempt to offer potential solutions to reconnect humans with the world. These authors present also similarities with respect to the form of their writings. If Austen and Burney both use literary devices such as irony and heteroglossia, Radcliffe’s use of horror and sublime description

³⁵ Criticizing the shame associated with the reading of novels, Austen, in *Northanger Abbey*, famously ironizes and denounces the devaluation of novels: “It is only *Cecilia*, or *Camilla*, or *Belinda*; or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusion of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language” (60).

are not without an echo in Burney's work, where despite the satirical impulse that characterizes it, there are genuine horrific moments.³⁶ Sublime scenes and experiences of terror are also present in Austen's novels, even if in a much more subdued and tempered way.³⁷ Because of the necessity to limit my enquiry to a reasonable length, I do not include a study of Maria Edgeworth's novels in this dissertation, a decision that is also propelled by what I deem to be a greater proximity between Austen, Burney, and Radcliffe's works.³⁸

In considering the relationships between eighteenth-century women novelists and modern philosophy, I do not assume that these novelists certainly read thoroughly all the major works of eighteenth-century philosophers. While it would be potentially misleading to make such a claim, it is reasonable to suppose that these women authors likely had access to direct and indirect sources of philosophical works, or had been brought into contact in

³⁶There are indeed moments of terror and gloom in Burney's novels that prefigure Radcliffe's gothic descriptions. Delvile's castle, in *Cecilia*, with its antiquity, remoteness, and prison-like aspect, can easily be compared to some of Radcliffe's abbeys and castles, where her heroines experience solitude and terror. The frightening adventure that befalls Evelina when she goes to Marylebone gardens with the Branghtons and Mme Duval is also quite terrifying. She suddenly loses all her friends, and not knowing where to go, she is approached and talked to by many men, before one decides to seize her hand. She runs from him to seek the help of two ladies, who turn out to be prostitutes. She is finally saved from this unfortunate company by the sight of one person belonging to her party. Even if the adventure is of short duration, it is an episode of terror and distress in which a young lady is pursued by unwanted suiters in a manner that resembles the motifs and plotlines of many gothic stories. The element that remains unique to Burney, though, is humor, which contrasts with the frightful aspect of the scene.

³⁷ In Austen's works, one would not find extensive descriptions of sublime landscapes, but many of her characters do have a romantic taste for nature, like Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, who love to take long walks in nature and to read poetry. Her love of poetry and nature makes her similar to some of Ann Radcliffe's heroines, notably Emily, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Scenes of terror and distress remain often at the periphery of the main narrative, but they have a real impact on the life of more important characters. The elopement of Maria Bertram with Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park* is a great source of distress and shame for the Bertram family, while the elopement of Lydia with Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* is the cause of anxiety, terror and great sadness for her sisters and parents. In *Persuasion*, the machinations of Mr. Elliot to marry Anne while courting the scheming Mrs. Clay, his previous misconduct towards Mrs. Smith and her dead husband, makes him a real villain, even if he is not painted in terms as horrific and terrifying as the signor Montoni, for instance, in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

³⁸ While Maria Edgeworth is an important writer who may have had a decisive influence on Austen's work, I see a greater proximity between Austen, Burney, and Radcliffe, largely because of the resilient, courageous, intelligent, compassionate, and gracious heroines they construct, of their style, and of their use of a central narrative that features a heroine's journey through the difficulties of the world and her subsequent growth in wisdom and self-awareness.

various ways with Enlightenment philosophical ideas. For instance, Austen and Burney had access, through their fathers, to important libraries at home; both of their brothers went to university and may very well have shared books and knowledge with their sisters. Burney, in particular, benefited from a highly educated and fashionable entourage. After the publication and success of her first novel, *Evelina*, she began to associate with Mrs. Hester Thrale, who hosted a salon where many intellectuals, writers, and painters, such as Dr. Johnson, Edmund Burke, and Joshua Reynolds also gathered.³⁹ Such an environment certainly helped her intellectual formation and deepened her knowledge about the important philosophical ideas of her time. Radcliffe, for her part, was married to a journalist who was an Oxford graduate, who possessed considerable knowledge and many books, and who was aware of all the prominent ideas of the time. She also frequented before her marriage her uncle Bentley's house, where many intellectuals and artists used to visit.⁴⁰ She may have obtained from them information about eighteenth-century political, aesthetic, and moral ideas, as well as reading recommendations. Austen was the daughter of an Anglican rector who studied at Oxford and who taught some pupils at home. He possessed an extensive library and took care to instruct his children and share with them his love for English literature.⁴¹ Her brother James also went to Oxford and could very well have talked with her and other members of the family about books and authors of the period. However close or distant their contact with Enlightenment philosophers' ideas and books, these three women novelists were in contact with these ideas in various ways. In their time, it was not necessary to have read Locke's *Essay* or Hume's *Treatise* to have

³⁹ See Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney. The Life in the Works*, 39.

⁴⁰ See Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe. The Great Enchantress*, 22-23.

⁴¹ See Mary Augusta Austen-Leigh, *Personal Aspects of Jane Austen*, 25.

heard about and grappled with the important features of the modern conception of the self. The most important ideas of Enlightenment philosophy were not confined to learned books and scholarly circles. They spread and infiltrated the “cultural mainstream” (Gevirtz 6) through works of vulgarization, conversations, letters, newspapers, and magazines, all of which were accessible to women. On a deeper level, the new conception of the self and the epistemic problems that stem from its separation from the world, were already conditioning the way in which people saw themselves. In other words, the modern conception of the self, as well as its potential alienation from others and the fluctuations of personal identity, were ideas already in the air, understandable to anyone who paid attention. It is reasonable to assume that this must have sufficed to influence the writings of perceptive and intelligent women.

Literary Cognitivism

One of the most prominent issues raised by the central claim of this dissertation—that eighteenth-century British women used the novel to discuss philosophical ideas—concerns the cognitive potential of novels, if one assumes, as I do, that novels can be used to discuss and represent philosophical problems and contribute to the deepening and completion of our understanding of these ideas. I therefore demonstrate how a work of literary fiction might contain elements of truth and provide knowledge, or to put it slightly differently, how literary language, however prosaic, tied to a narrative structure involving fictitious events and characters, might convey general truths about humans and the world. Some may consider this demonstration fastidious or unnecessary, considering that the cognitive dimension of novel has been widely asserted by many authors since the Renaissance. For my part, I claim that to presume that novels contain truths about humans

on the simple basis that many have asserted it in the past is not the same thing as undertaking to prove it. The latter task is much more difficult than the first, and it remains necessary, since some philosophers still reject that possibility on the basis of a certain understanding of knowledge that implies a correspondence to reality, discursivity, and empirical verification. Obviously, no work of fiction can ever meet these requirements. However, works of fiction may correspond to another understanding of what knowledge is. As I will demonstrate, the problem attached to the “truth” of literary texts harkens back to the old quarrel between philosophy and literature, started by Plato around 375 B.C.⁴² Plato’s dismissal of poetry in *The Republic* as an inferior mode of knowledge – one unable to grasp the intelligible forms and condemned to copy the objects of the sensible world, was not followed by all philosophers, starting with his own student, Aristotle, for whom literary imitation was a source of knowledge, closer to philosophy than to history.

This dissertation is interested in the Aristotelian position regarding the cognitive dimension of literature, which is still vindicated by many contemporary philosophers who work in the analytical tradition of aesthetic philosophy.⁴³ Influenced by philosophical theses about the cognitive function of literature, I develop the idea that literature provides hypotheses that are somehow tested through literary experiment – ones that can enlarge our imagination with possibilities through which we can widen and complete our knowledge of the world. I suggest that literature also affords concrete, contextualized

⁴² A discussion of poetry and its place in a future ideal city is outlined in Plato’s *Republic*, where it takes up almost an entire chapter. See Plato, *Republic*, X, 558-571 (596a-608b)

⁴³ In his *Poetics*, Aristotle claims that poetic imitation is a source of knowledge, and that tragedy resembles philosophy, because poetic imitation is about general types and probabilities instead of particulars. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, IV, 6 and IX, 11-12 (1448b, 1451b). Many contemporary philosophers agree with Aristotle on this point and attribute to literature and to art in general a cognitive function. In this dissertation, I will examine more closely the works of thinkers who explore this question, including Arthur Danto, John Gibson, Wolfgang Huemer, Catherine Z. Elgin, and Hilary Putnam.

exemplifications of ideas that are too abstract and general to be fully comprehended. My investigation reveals, moreover, the important role played by the reader in literature's cognitive claim. It is through the reader's sympathetic response to characters' emotions and actions that truths about human life can be grasped and disclosed. This examination of literature's role in the development of knowledge is tied to my examination of the relationship between reality and fiction. Certainly, it is a challenge to demonstrate that works of fiction can offer a form of truth about the real world, since their content does not refer to any existing thing in the world. If Plato and some contemporary philosophers were not able to reconcile fiction and truth, tending to set them in stark opposition to each other, other philosophers have insisted on the proximity of reality and fiction, holding that reality can be perceived and known through fiction and that our understanding of human life can be enriched by the possibilities it discloses. The philosophers among which I choose to situate myself do not deny that there are differences between literature and philosophy, and between fiction and reality. They maintain these distinctions, but they insist on the interplay between them and advocate for their complementary relationship.⁴⁴ This dissertation establishes literature's cognitive contribution before going on to describe the ways in which eighteenth-century novels written by women, most especially the novels of Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen, contain concrete exemplifications of philosophical problems, evoke diverse possibilities about human life, display ethical

⁴⁴ In chapter two of this dissertation, I examine the positions of philosophers for whom all written texts or discourses are literature. This position brings them to deny the possibility of any objectivity in scientific or philosophical discourse. Among them, one finds Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty. I also examine the positions of philosophers such as Arthur Danto, Hilary Putnam, and Martha Nussbaum who insist on the distinctions between science, philosophy, and literature. I place myself within the latter group.

reflections, and induce aesthetic sympathies through which the reader gains access to a better understanding of humans and the world.

The Development of the Argument

The following chapter is dedicated to an examination of the historical phenomenon of the relatively sudden rise of the British woman novelist in the eighteenth century. My intention in this chapter is to situate in their historical context the three women authors considered in the dissertation, and to provide a definition of the novel, a new genre in which these women took a particular interest. I do not intend to bring new light to this important and oft-discussed subject, nor do I propose a new interpretation of the origins of the English novel. My objective is merely to describe the environment in which the three novelists considered evolved and created their works. What is nonetheless specific to my interpretation of the participation of women novelists in their literary milieu is the importance I bestow on the aesthetic features of the novel; I argue that the particular form of the novel was one of the central reasons for women's predilection for the genre. I also insist on the emancipating dimension of privacy for women, on the positive value that can be attributed to the concept of "home", while pointing at the same time to the blurry separation between the private and the public spheres in the eighteenth-century. As I explain in this chapter, before 1660, British women's participation in literary spheres was limited mostly to manuscript culture. The development of print culture in the eighteenth century gave rise to a new phenomenon: the professional woman writer.⁴⁵ During this

⁴⁵ In chapter one, I allude to the important work done by feminist critics such as Janet Todd on the rediscovery of the importance of eighteenth-century British novelists, but I also point, in note 66, to some critiques that have been made against a sometimes uniform, gendered scholarly portrait of the situation of women novelists in the eighteenth century. Betty Schellenberg, for instance, refuses to interpret what she calls "The Great Forgetting" in terms of gender discrimination, but rather invokes the particularity of each novelist, male or female, and draws attention on the multiple causes of the erasure of their work. See Betty Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of the Women Writer in Eighteenth-Century Britain*.

period, women started to engage in modes of public literary production on an unprecedented scale. Among many others, two important factors emerged as central to this phenomenon: economic transformations and changing spiritual values. I support the view, held by Ian Watt and Cheryl Turner, according to which the increase in spare time and idleness for middle class women in the eighteenth century, due to the industrialization of home products, provided them with time to read and write. Following Charles Taylor and Nancy Armstrong, I signal the importance of puritan values amongst certain members of the growing middle class. This development prompted the members of this class to promote domesticity and privacy, as well as discipline and industry. These values encouraged women to write, read, and discuss personal and public matters with their correspondents. I also explore why many eighteenth-century women chose the novel, rather than other existing genres. The novel, as a new genre, appeared to be free of many conventional rules. Contrary to poetry or drama, the novel did not come with the weight of a tradition and could not display an intimidating set of classical standards. Evoking most women's lack of a classical education during this period, I suggest that they may have felt more comfortable with the freedom that this new genre seemed to offer. Novels were also generally about the everyday lives of ordinary people, whose inner thoughts and emotions were explored. Living in the house and without external professional occupations, middle class women had considerable knowledge on this subject; they had time to reflect on and analyze their thoughts and feelings, as well as those of others. My principal claim in the first chapter, however, insists upon the ways in which the aesthetic form of novels allowed for eighteenth-century British women's engagements with literary and philosophical reflection. Based on diverse definitions of the Western novel outlined by scholars and

philosophers such as Ian Watt, Mikhail Bakhtin, Georg Lukàcs, Milan Kundera, and Martha Nussbaum, I present the hypothesis that the process of decentralization that operates in the novel — enabled through irony, heteroglossia, and sympathetic emotions — allowed eighteenth-century British women writers to criticize the dominant perspectives of their time from their own marginalized points of view.

In chapter two, I consider the problem raised by my principal claim, that eighteenth-century women novelists used the novel to engage with philosophical problems. Against the objection that novels cannot provide any access to truth or to any form of knowledge because they do not constitute a demonstrative or discursive discourse, I defend the capacity of literature, and more precisely, the novel, to provide profound insight into truth. I demonstrate that this epistemic suspicion against novels is very old and has its origin in Plato's rejection of poetry from his ideal city in *The Republic*. This old quarrel between philosophy and literature thrives to this day, but I argue against it, first by returning to the opposition between Plato and Aristotle regarding the cognitive value of literature as a *mimetic art*, and by turning to various contemporary philosophers such as Hilary Putnam, Catherine Z. Elgin, John Gibson, Stanley Cavell, Martha Nussbaum, and Wolfgang Huemer to support my major claim, which is that philosophical knowledge about human life remains incomplete and partially ineffective without literature. More precisely, what I attempt to argue in this important theoretical chapter is that the epistemic role of literature consists in providing an occasion to test and prove certain philosophical theories, to contextualize abstract propositions, and to achieve, on the part of the reader, through faculties such as the imagination and emotions, a more complete understanding of human life.

In chapter three, I examine how an important and popular eighteenth-century British woman novelist, Frances Burney, used the literary resources of the novel to exemplify and question, through the means of irony and heteroglossia, the alienation of the modern self from the world, using the perspective of one of its most estranged inhabitants: women. My claim is that Frances Burney's novels explore this problem deeply. I demonstrate how Burney's heroines suffer from different forms of social alienation, notably through their lack of real, proper names. The world in which they enter is inhospitable. It repudiates them through strange sets of rules, the use of absurd and coded jargon, and the presence of arbitrary conventions, codes, and rituals. Burney's novels demonstrate that in such an alienating world, one's identity is threatened by societal codes and values, and by the pressure exerted on people to conform to these rules. In her fictional worlds, the impossibility to satisfy social demands may lead a person to momentary episodes of insanity. Through remarkable delineations of descents into madness, notably the one experienced by Cecilia in Burney's second novel, Burney brings to the fore the experience of the progressive loss of one's identity through a process of disintegration that affects body and soul. These passages illustrate many eighteenth-century philosophical debates about the continuity of personal identity and the interaction between body and soul. If the heroines generally recover a sense of identity as well as their sanity at the end of each of Burney's novels, the rapidity and expediency of these happy conclusions leave readers with an impression of profound doubt about the possibility of overcoming through philosophical or political means their estrangement from the world. Burney's novels depict a strong sense of doubt about the possibility for the human subject, especially if this subject

is female, to reintegrate into the world and to feel at home in it. These novels, I argue, remain pessimistic about a potential reconciliation between humans and their world.

In chapter four, I demonstrate how Ann Radcliffe's gothic novels engage in specific ways with Rousseau's Romanticism and with Kant's and Burke's aesthetic theories on the sublime and the beautiful. I argue that through their influence, Radcliffe articulates an original response to the modern problem of the division between the self, others, and the world. The depiction of the isolated, threatened individual as an easy prey for villains and their snares is remarkably expressed by Radcliffe through the means of the gothic form. By provoking passions of fear and pity, I demonstrate that the gothic novel performs a *cathartic effect* on readers – one through which they can begin to understand what alienation and homelessness really are. Moreover, Radcliffe's use of picturesque landscapes and of terrifying buildings such as old castles and abbeys, represented as *sublime*, enable her to express in the most accurate manner her dramatic vision of the world and the dangers it contains. However, she also presents sublime emotions as a means of liberation for the oppressed self, which has the potential to extend its imaginative powers beyond the limitations of its enclosed subjectivity. I argue, moreover, that her major contribution to the philosophical discussions of the 1790s resides in the power she bestows on the imagination, conceived as the source of the aesthetic emotions of the sublime and the beautiful, making the aesthetic experience a site of reconciliation between the subject and the world. As I demonstrate, Radcliffe shows that imagination and aesthetic sensibility could help the self to overcome fear and terror and to enter an aesthetic community of equals. Radcliffe's novels appear in this light less pessimistic than those of Burney, because

they present to the readers aesthetic and political ways to combat oppression and to take their place in the world.

Finally, in chapter five, I explore the meaning of the quasi-disappearance in Jane Austen's novels of the themes of alienation and abandonment. In Austen's novels, threats and dangers seem considerably diminished in number and intensity (in comparison to the works of Burney and Radcliffe), and replaced by reflections about the role of fiction and moral responsibility. My principal claim in this chapter is that Austen's departure from the dramatic representation of the isolated self in Burney's novels and from the terrors of Radcliffe's gothic romances was motivated by her ironic gaze, which expresses her conscience of the proximity of reality and fiction, and also by her awareness of the moral necessity to respond to others and the claims they make upon us. As I argue, instead of a separation, Austen's use of irony suggests a proximity between the individual's mind and the "real" world. For her, what we imagine is not so different from what actually is. In this light, fiction may be understood as a powerful means through which to understand the world. Through an analysis of *Northanger Abbey*, I explore the complex relationships that tie together fiction, imagination, and reality for Austen as I look at the formation and development of Catherine Morland's judgment and character. As I explain, Austen's reflections on fiction, the imagination and probable reasonings about matters of facts, bring her perspectives quite close to the ideas developed by contemporary philosophers such as David Hume and Emmanuel Kant. In the second part of this chapter, I investigate the moral dimension of Austen's novels. Her genuine interest in morality and the cultivation of virtues appear as an important reason that explains why she refused to dissipate the reality of the world or to paint it in nightmarish, hallucinating strokes. In other words, Austen's

novels seem to suggest that we must believe in the reality of the world because we are compelled to act in it, to sympathize with others, and to confront our subjective perceptions with theirs. Through an analysis of *Persuasion*, Austen's last novel, I demonstrate that it is through a process of self-education performed by the means of mutual sympathy and self-awareness that the world can cease to be an alienating place in which others are only opaque and indecipherable obstacles to our desires. In this novel, Austen engages with Adam Smith's notion of mutual sympathy and illustrates its operations through concrete characters such as Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth. She demonstrates how, through mutual sympathy, one can practice self-awareness, develop a knowledge of others' perspectives, and finally break his/her mutual estrangement and isolation. This chapter, *in fine*, reveals that far from the pessimism of Burney and the horrors depicted by Radcliffe, Austen's novels find a genuine solution for the alienation brought about by the modern predicament. Through the demonstration of the proximity of fiction, imagination, and the world, and through the workings of mutual sympathy, which enables us to see the perspectives of others and to become aware of the flaws and distortions of our own, Austen presents to us the world as a place where we can relate to each other and belong.

Chapter One

The Historical Context: British Women Novelists in the Eighteenth Century

1.1 Eighteenth-Century British Women and the Novel

From the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, England experienced an unprecedented blooming of women novelists. This phenomenon has already been analyzed and explained by many eminent scholars.⁴⁶ Alongside the uncommon participation of British women in the literary sphere, the eighteenth century was also characterized by the emergence of new philosophical theories that proposed a rational and critical vision of the world. However, unlike novelists, among whom figured numerous prominent women, philosophers were mostly male.⁴⁷ The scarcity of women among professional philosophers, did not necessarily mean that women were not interested by these new philosophical topics. On the contrary, what I would like to argue is that eighteenth-century British women used a relatively new literary genre, the novel, to test, to discuss, and to explore the significance of these new philosophical theories.⁴⁸ The main purpose of this chapter is therefore to demonstrate the epistemological value of these novels and to specify to what degree they contributed to the discussion, illustration, and dissemination of the main philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment. However, before embarking on this

⁴⁶ Women's major involvement in novel-writing during the eighteenth century has been amply recognized by many scholars, such as Ian Watt, J.P. Hunter, Michael McKeon, Ros Ballaster, Jane Spencer, Dale Spender, Katharine Binhammer, Cheryl Turner, Mark Towsey, and Nancy Armstrong, among others. They provide interesting cultural, social, economic, or political explanations for this unprecedented event. Nevertheless, none of them really considers this phenomenon in relation to its aesthetical and epistemological implications, with the exception, perhaps, of Karen Bloom Gevirtz, in her book *Women, the Novel, and Natural Philosophy, -1660-1727*. Her work is, however, restricted to early women novelists of the eighteenth century and is also centered mostly on natural philosophy.

⁴⁷ There were, of course, women philosophers and scientists in the eighteenth century, but they were relatively scarce. Among the major ones are Margaret Lucas Cavendish, Mary Astell, Elizabeth Thomas, Catharine Trotter Cockburn, Mary Wollstonecraft, Germaine de Staël, and Émilie du Chatelêt.

⁴⁸ My contention, however, is not that women were the only ones who used the novel, in the eighteenth century, to engage with philosophical ideas. Of course, some male novelists also refer to philosophical debates and theories in their work, notably Fielding and Sterne. However, the fact that most women started to write novels, as opposed to philosophical treatises, in so great a number, suggests that it was for them a determined choice. They seemed to have found the novel form more appropriate to discuss philosophical issues.

demonstration, it is necessary to circumscribe the scope and extent of eighteenth-century British women's literary contributions and to present the possible causes of this new tendency. As mentioned in the introduction, my intention is not to offer a new explanation for the involvement of eighteenth-century British women in novel writing. This subject has been amply studied by others. My specific contribution will consist in the demonstration of the aesthetical reasons behind their choice of a particular medium, the novel, to express philosophical ideas. This demonstration will imply an attempt at a definition of the novel that extends beyond the confines of the eighteenth-century context. In doing so, I will employ the philosophical perspective evoked in the introduction.⁴⁹ According to that perspective, the historical rise of eighteenth-century British women novelists and their choice of the novel to articulate philosophical issues will be undertaken without relying on a specific standpoint or a particular theory as the frame. An attempt toward neutrality and impartiality will therefore be required to determine this event "in itself," instead of reading it through the specific lens of a predetermined grid.

1.2 The Real and Perceived Importance of Women Novelists in the Eighteenth Century

The important participation of women in literary authorship, notably through the means of the novel, a genre that was regarded in England at that time as both new and morally dubious, is a phenomenon that was recorded by male contemporaries with various degrees of satisfaction. According to a contemptuous English reviewer, "This branch of the literary trade appears now to be entirely engrossed by ladies" (*Monthly Review* 1773: vol. 48, 154). Even if this comment does not represent the opinions of all men about

⁴⁹ For a complete discussion of this philosophical perspective, see introduction, 11-20.

women's literary contributions at the time,⁵⁰ the reviewer's scornful and disdainful tone demonstrates that certain men deplored and tended consequently to exaggerate women's domination of the novel-writing scene. What was often implicit in these men's estimations of women's literary prominence in novel-writing during this period is a belief that the quantity of women's literary production was inversely proportional to its quality. However, as Jane Spencer has justly pointed out, the evaluation that certain men have made of the importance of women's novel production over theirs—an opinion that has since been reiterated by various scholars⁵¹ without being thoroughly verified — was exaggerated and came more from their fear of being supplanted, or from misogynistic prejudices, than from objective observation.⁵²

However, if the number of women novelists in the eighteenth century, as well as their so-called domination of the genre might have been overestimated by some critics of the period, it would be unreasonable to deny women's growing importance, at that time, as writers of novels. It may also be argued that the distorted and exaggerated picture given by some critics about women's incursion into the novel domain reflected in amplification a real increase of women's literary participation. As Cheryl Turner justly remarks, "the extremity of the language employed suggests that these market observers were indeed

⁵⁰ I don't intend, here, to put all eighteenth-century male critics in the same group. Some famous literary men and philosophers saw women's literary contributions as being superior in quality to novels of the time and therefore not things to deplore. Samuel Richardson, for instance, praised and admired women's literary achievements, and the same can be said about the very influential Samuel Johnson. One can find an expression of the latter's high opinion of literary women in an extract of one of his letters to James Boswell: "I dined yesterday at Mrs. Garrick's, with Mrs. Carter, Hannah More, and Miss Fanny Burney. Three such women are not to be found; I know not where I could find a fourth, except Mrs. Lennox, who is superior to them all" (Johnson qtd. in Norma Clarke ix). All the women named in this letter are either novelists, writers of conduct books, or translators of classical texts.

⁵¹ More recent allusions to eighteenth-century women's novelistic prolixity might be found in Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, 339 and Probyn, *English Fiction of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1789*, 2.

⁵² See Jane Spencer, "Women Writers and the Eighteenth-Century Novel," 212.

responding to a substantial incursion by women writers” (31). However, even if women did write more in the eighteenth century than they had previously done, and even if they chose the novel over other literary genres, their literary production was not necessarily continuous. Women’s literary production varied greatly in amount over the course of the eighteenth century. In fact, their contributions to the development of the novel were quite irregular.⁵³ During long stretches, such as between 1720 and 1740, and from 1740 until the 1780s, novels written by women were quantitatively equal or inferior to those written by men. It was only at the end of the century, when the production of novels in general had undergone a tremendous expansion, that “women novelists may have equaled or slightly outnumbered men in certain subgenres such as the epistolary novel” (Spencer 212). The same could be said about women’s so-called appetite for novel reading, which was deemed so high at the time that it appeared as a potential source of corruption of their minds and morals. On that subject, Mark Towsey has convincingly demonstrated that the eighteenth-century woman in fact read various sort of books, not only novels, and that men were also readers of novels in an equivalent proportion.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, even if the incursion of women in the literary field was never as dominant as certain contemporaries and critics have professed it to be, women’s participation in the domain of novel-writing at that time remained unprecedentedly high.

⁵³ Cheryl Turner has minutely recorded women’s novel production in the eighteenth century and showed that it underwent different phases of expansion and reduction. Pioneers of the genre, Eliza Haywood, Delarivier Manley, and Aphra Behn were prolific authors from approximately 1700 to 1720, but from this date until 1740, a significant decline in novel production occurred, followed by a progressive ascent until it reached a boom between 1780 and 1800. According to Turner, it was only in the last decades of the eighteenth century that women can be said to have slightly outnumbered men in the field of novel writing. See Turner, *Living by the Pen*, 31-59.

⁵⁴ See Towsey, “Women as Readers and Writers,” 31-36.

Despite their historic contribution to the genre, eighteenth-century novels written by women were generally neglected and underestimated by scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fortunately, this perspective then changed and evolved, and their importance is now generally recognized.⁵⁵ This late recognition seems hard to explain since the novel, as a genre, in the eighteenth century, was envisaged primarily as *feminine*, even when the author was a man. This belief was grounded in the importance given to female characters and female lives in novels, as well as to their somewhat didactic content. Probably influenced by romances, most novels foregrounded women characters and women's lives, as if there was, as Nancy Armstrong has suggested, an intimate relationship between the rise of a certain ideal of women identity and the rise of the novel as a new genre.⁵⁶ Another factor that explains the importance given to female heroines in novels, can be found in the culture of sensibility, which developed in England around the mid-eighteenth century. This new culture helped to promote women's value as human beings, because they were perceived as possessing a natural tendency to feel intense emotions and to be sympathetically responsive to others. These sentimental qualities allowed them to acquire a superior moral status and to be placed at the center of a story worthy to be told. In a sense, this philosophical and literary current elevated women above the misogynistic

⁵⁵ See McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1700-1740*; Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Context of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*.

⁵⁶ Nancy Armstrong argues quite convincingly that the novel is in large part a parent of the conduct book, a genre that flourished at the time, and that was concerned with the elaboration of a moral ideal of woman, possessing virtues specific to her gender and who lived preferably in the private and domestic sphere, where she apparently ruled. For her, the novel presents this ideal in a narrative form and contributes to a discourse about gender differences and roles that helped to bring about the middle-class's rise to power. Despite the gender differences most people saw between men and women, the general mental attributes and qualities prescribed to women in eighteenth-century novels would tend to be universalized to men as well, making the women guardians of morality, responsible for their husbands and children's conducts, and appearing as one of the pillars of middle-class power. See Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, 27.

contempt that pervaded the literature of the Restoration's period, to a level where they were idolized, often construed as "protestant virgins" (Todd 20) and framed as the "consciousness of society" (18). Therefore, if the novel was perceived as *feminine*, it certainly had something to do with this new culture and its tendency to see women as exemplary moral heroines.⁵⁷

The construction and glorification of a certain ideal of woman during this period seemed to have been a major concern of the novel as a new genre. To a certain extent, the novel might be understood as the laboratory where this ideal was synthesized.⁵⁸ If we agree, with scholars such as Mikhaïl Bakhtin, Georg Lukàcs, and Charles Taylor, that the novel is a typically modern genre, that is, a literary form in which the modern subject is represented and explored in his/her inner recesses and mental proceedings, it would be plausible to state that the modern subject was constructed in the novel from the perspective of a female character.⁵⁹ Although Samuel Richardson helped greatly to forge the ideal

⁵⁷ Many literary historians and critics have remarked that the eighteenth-century novel, dominated by female authorship and readership, was greatly influenced by the development of a culture of sensibility, in which women were central. See Watts 43-45; G.J Barker-Benfield 161-173; Todd 20-21. Sensibility, conceived as the ability to be moved deeply by the joy or sorrow of others through sympathetic emotions that pervade the mind as well as the body, was also, according to Markman Ellis, a powerful instrument of political change. Quoting a passage of Frances Burney's journal in which she relates the strong impression that the reading of *The Vicar of Wakefield* had on her, notably the ways it prompted her to think about the unnecessary brutality of the death penalty, Ellis demonstrates that the sentiments the novel arouses have the potential to propel the reader to question political or legal institutions. For Ellis, it is certain that "the sentimental novel effectively created a new political role for literature" (3). For his part, Barker-Benfield asserts that women, through their reading and writing of sentimental novels, "first gained their awakening to self-consciousness as a group" (xviii) and "made their suffering at the hands of men a central focus" (xviii). Specialists of eighteenth-century novels of sensibility seem to agree about the important role that women played in the rise and the popularity of these novels. They also tend to connect this new culture of sensibility with the emerging middle-class and the practical and democratic values it had inherited from puritanism.

⁵⁸ See Armstrong 17-18.

⁵⁹ In his essay *Discourse in the Novel*, Bakhtine makes a parallel between the novel and the modern process of decentralization that he called Galilean, in reference to the great epistemological changes that happened after the Renaissance. See Bakhtine 366. According to Georg Lukàcs, the novel is a literary genre that has developed specifically in the modern world, and which is symptomatic of the separation that occurred at that time between the subject and the world. For him, the natural unity of the epic has been destroyed, and the task of the novel's hero is to reunite and reconcile the subject with the world. See Lukàcs 26. For Charles

image of the female modern subject, the increasing number of female novelists, who instilled in their work their own vision of what constitutes an ideal woman also contributed significantly to the formation of the modern subject from a woman's point of view.⁶⁰

1.3 Women's Literary Engagement as a Means of Emancipation: The Private and Public Spheres

This sudden increase of women's participation in the literary domain, which was previously dominated by men, can also be interpreted as a sign that women had, by the eighteenth century, acquired more freedom and autonomy. As female authorship became more and more accepted throughout the century⁶¹ —albeit not without struggle and resistance— women were gradually allowed to participate in public discussions around moral, social and political issues through their writings. This phenomenon was closely related to their growing literacy and improved education. As recognized by many critics, eighteenth-century middle-class women received a better education than their elders and came to form a notorious public readership with a critical voice. Many studies show that, from the end of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, the literacy rates of women exploded.⁶² According to Mark Towsey, by 1780, “virtually all women

Taylor, the novel manifests paradigmatically the new consciousness that developed in the modern era. Permeated by modern culture, the novel is interested in ordinary life and embodies new ideas about equality. See Taylor 286-289.

⁶⁰ This is, of course, one of the important claims of Nancy Armstrong's work, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. Karen Bloom Gevirtz takes a similar position when she points to the gender differences that exist in the construction of the modern subject and describes how women used the novel to engage, in their own way, with the epistemological problems raised by these new conceptions of self and knowledge. See Gevirtz 7.

⁶¹ As we have seen, some men did not react very positively to women's incursion in the literary sphere. Many of them tended to exaggerate the extent of their production and to diminish their worth. The bad reputation of novels added to this general contemptuous reception. Novels had a dubious reputation mostly because of the potential harm that they were supposed to inflict on their readers, especially when these readers were female. To aggravate the case, one must mention the ambiguous and sulfurous aura of the first generation of women novelists from which the subsequent women novelists had to distinguish themselves. On this subject, see Spencer, *Women Writers and the Eighteenth Century Novel*, 212; Turner 31.

⁶² See Mark Towsey, “Women as Readers and Writers”; Watts, *The Rise of the Novel*; Langford. *A Polite and Commercial People, England 1727-1783*, 21-22.

from aristocratic, gentry, and professional family were able to engage to some degree with print” (21). Moreover, he suggests that the passion for reading, notably with others, and the sharing of literary opinions through letter writing, led women to become writers themselves and to promote the writings of others. For instance, the prominent head of the Bluestockings, Elizabeth Montagu, was not only engaged in a rich correspondence with other women on various subjects, but also wrote an essay on Shakespeare, while encouraging and patronizing other women writers, such as Hester Chapone.⁶³ In a society that wished to encourage women to retreat to the private sphere of the home and to cultivate domestic virtues, the practice of collective reading, the criticism of books in letters to friends and family, enabled them to participate, despite their relative domestic seclusion, in a literary community, and to engage through their reading and writing with the social, political, and moral problems of their time.⁶⁴

We must therefore be careful not to conclude hastily that the eighteenth-century ideal of the domestic woman, confined to the private sphere of the household, necessarily meant that women were shut out of the public sphere of intellectual and political discussion. In some ways, as Jane Spencer has remarked, these spheres were not as separated and clearly distinguished as they would become later.⁶⁵ Between the house and the State, the eighteenth century developed a civil sphere, a domain that was private, in a sense, but also public, in another, because it was accessible to a wide range of people through print culture, coffee houses, clubs, salons, or correspondence. This new domain was very influential; it

⁶³ Elizabeth Montagu’s *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare* (1769) received great praise by the critics, and Hester Chapone’s conduct book, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773), which Montagu patronized, was very influential and successful, being reedited sixteenth times.

⁶⁴ On this subject, see Towsey. “Women as Readers and Writers”; Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People, England 1727-1783*; Spencer, “Women Writers and the Eighteenth Century Novel.”

⁶⁵ See Spencer 217.

was there that ideas circulated, and opinions were formed. This conversational space where people were free to express their opinions, share their discoveries, and argue about what was right or wrong in scientific, social, moral, and political issues, was greatly dependent on books, newspapers, and magazines. Fortunately, books and magazines, contrary to clubs and coffee houses, were accessible to women.⁶⁶

This public sphere, distinct from the state, and dependent on print culture, was, according to Immanuel Kant, a powerful means for the progress of humanity. It is important to note, however, that what Kant considered private was not merely the home or the domestic sphere, it extended also to one's profession. As he wrote in *What is Enlightenment?*, if humans are bound to obey without reasoning in the private sphere of their social obligations, they ought to use their reason and be critical, when they leave this sphere to enter the public realm of the learned, where it is their duty to partake of what they know and criticize what they find either false or unjust.⁶⁷ For Kant, humans must be encouraged to develop a *public use of reason*, which he defines as "the kind of use which that one makes thereof as a scholar before the reading world" (*What is Enlightenment* 19). According to him, the public use of reason does not depend on a political participation in the institutions of the State, but rather on a capacity to read and write. Therefore, one might affirm that a large portion of women in the eighteenth century belonged to this public sphere of the learned, even if they remained largely in their homes and did not occupy any public function. Apparently, their domestic situation did not impede each of them from

⁶⁶ For more on the development of a public sphere in the eighteenth century, see Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.

⁶⁷ See Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*, 19-20.

using their reason in a public way, that is, “as a scholar who addresses a public” (Kant, *What is Enlightenment* 19).

Living in a state, Prussia, where the monarch was absolute and the people were unauthorized to participate in the states’ decisions, Kant found that the only way to form a public sphere through which people could debate important scientific and political issues was through writing and reading. If the situation of men in Britain during this period was probably improved in terms of political opportunities and participation, this was not the case for women. They were not allowed nor encouraged to participate in public matters of the state. Nevertheless, nothing prevented them from participating in the public reading sphere, the one in which public opinions were formed and debated; this was due to their increasing ability and propensity to read and write. Moreover, their very position as outsiders and onlookers is precisely what entitled women to form the ideal public sphere. According to Hannah Arendt, the public to whom Kant was referring in his political and historical writings, was not formed by the *actors* of the world, but rather by its *spectators*, the ones who, placed at a critical distance, were able to consider the events and reflect upon them.⁶⁸ Because of their increased reading and writing abilities, and because of their habits of collective reading and epistolary relations, women were prominent members of the new public sphere of readers and, although they were not the actors of political life, they were avid and curious spectators of the world, if not the most significant ones.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Hannah Arendt explained that the enlarged mentality that is required, for Kant, to judge impartially the political events of the world, supposes the point of view of a “*Weltbetrachter*,” or a world-spectator. See Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 44.

⁶⁹ In their introduction to *Women, Writing and the Public Space*, the editors argue that Habermas’ conception of the public sphere must be revised, notably because it excludes women of that sphere or minimizes their importance. They also suggest that the distinction he propounds between private and public spheres is too rigid and exclusive. While insisting on the presence of some women in public places such as coffee-houses, the authors also argue for the permeability of private and public spheres in the eighteenth century. Sylvania

1.4 The Value Attributed to the Home: A Source of Alienation or the Affirmation of a Right to Privacy?

The view according to which eighteenth-century women gained power and importance through their literary and epistolary activities is not shared by everyone. According to some feminist critics, the ideology of the domestic woman that was promoted in most British novels from the mid-eighteenth century onward, and that confined women to their homes and attributed to them virtues of meekness, chastity, abnegation, and obedience, did not really help their emancipation.⁷⁰ For most of these critics, the conventions of seduction narratives, which formed, very often, the core of these novels, promoted the model of the chaste and domestic woman, and set it against unchaste behavior, vanity, mundanity, and disrespect of parental authority. According to the moral framework of these novels, if a woman aspires to respectability and wants to live a happy and comfortable life, in accordance with society's rules, she must learn to avoid seducers of all sorts, check her own desires, and develop a clear judgment with regards to the snares and false professions of mere seducers. For Nancy Armstrong, the ideal of the domestic woman, promoted in conduct books and novels of the time, contributed to establish a gendered representation of subjectivity, where men were attached to the political and economic spheres, and women were bound to the private sphere of the home.⁷¹ If this

Tomaselli, for instance, shows that the family, a unit where women were invested with some power, was not only private but also public. Indeed, the moral education women provided to their children was considered at the time as the pillar of society. I would like to go further and suggest not only that women were included in the new public sphere that was also, in a way, private, but that they were probably the more important members of that sphere. My claim is founded on a wider conception of the public sphere, inspired by Immanuel Kant's writings, according to which letter writing, reading, publication, education, and conversation constituted the *essence* of the new private/public sphere. See Eger et al. eds, *Women, Writing and the Public Space*, 7-9. See also Tomaselli, "The Most Public Space of All: The Family," 239-256.

⁷⁰ See Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*; Clarke, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770-1845*; Roussel, *The Conversation of the Sexes: Seduction and Equality in Selected Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Texts*.

⁷¹ See Armstrong 26.

seeming equal repartition of tasks and domains between the sexes gave to women a certain dominion over the house and the education of children, its chief aim for Armstrong was to replace the old aristocratic distinctions of rank, genealogy, and fortune by middle class hierarchies founded on merit and qualities of the mind, at the cost of female sexuality and freedom.

Nancy Armstrong and other feminist critics are not wrong when they see the ideology of the domestic woman as a means of control and oppression. However, as Katherine Binhammer has remarked, we should not read the novel of seduction, typical of the eighteenth century, as leading inevitably to the dominant nineteenth-century ideology of the domestic woman.⁷² For her, this ideology was not fixed, and tales of seduction afforded multiple outcomes that did not always fall into the conventions of the genre, where the poor woman is seduced, abandoned, and driven to misery, prostitution, and death. However, as Jane Spencer remarks, what was new in eighteenth-century culture was not the confinement of women to their homes but “the value placed on that home” (217). Contrary to the opinion of some feminists, for whom home was undoubtedly a site of alienation and oppression for women,⁷³ I would like to argue that the eighteenth-century novel also developed a positive and emancipatory conception of the home, which was not necessarily manipulative and deceitful.

The position that I defend here is partly influenced by Iris Marion Young’s conception of home as the locus of important values without which one cannot develop himself or herself fully and become an autonomous being.⁷⁴ Of course, Young fully

⁷² See Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800*, 5-7.

⁷³ See Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference*; De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

⁷⁴ See Young, “House and Home: Feminist variations on a theme” in *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy*.

recognizes that “the ideal of home and women’s association with home have been and are in many ways oppressive to women” (Allen 5). However, what she strives to assert is that “the idea of home also carries critical liberating potential because it expresses uniquely human values” (Young 134). Among these values stands the value of *privacy*. According to Young, if the *private* has been a means to confine women to their home and to submit them to the domination of their husbands or fathers, *privacy* is a value that can be emancipatory, if it is understood properly as a right for women to bodily integrity, to possess spaces and properties of their own, to choose who they see and meet, and to control information about themselves. Moreover, following Young, one can argue that a woman’s identity is somehow rooted in her private material belongings, in the space she occupies in the home, and that without this sort of “material identity” she would not be able to develop a concrete and sustained perception of herself. Thus, for Young, “Home is the site of the construction and reconstruction of one’s self” (163). This emphasis on home and on the possibility for women to have a private space of their own, to possess personal objects in order to become independent and autonomous beings, of course recalls Virginia Woolf’s position on having a room of one’s own as a material prerequisite for autonomy and identity.⁷⁵ It seems, therefore, that the value of privacy that accompanies the valorization of home is not necessarily a means to enslave women; it also has the potential to ensure women’s right to a space of their own, to an access to property, and to a certain control of their lives, while also providing the ideal conditions for creation and reflection. Consequently, I would argue that, despite its confining aspect, the movement toward home and privacy that dominated the eighteenth-century image of women and pervaded the

⁷⁵ See Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*.

novels of the time, was a revolutionary step that would in time emancipate them and lead them, paradoxically, outside the *home*.

The eighteenth-century emphasis on home and privacy is also closely linked to the modern conception of the self. As Charles Taylor has clearly demonstrated, modern thought placed a tremendous amount of importance on personal autonomy and the need for individuals to choose voluntarily their husband, wife, and friends. This tendency was accompanied by the idea that the family served as a protection from the encroachments of society, constituting a sort of haven where one's privacy would be protected. The privacy of the individual was also a right within the family, where there was a demand that each member should have a place of their own, unlike in ancient times, when the houses of the poor were crowded and where the rich would live in open view of their servants.⁷⁶ This demand for privacy, while it may not have always been heard and performed, included women as well. In a private space of their own, a woman could, much like Richardson's heroines Clarissa or Pamela, read and write, without the invasion of intruders. It seems therefore probable that a society that encouraged woman's reading and writing, that allowed them privacy to do so, was setting into motion a movement that would in time lead them out of their homes. However, this dialectic reversal was only possible in a society, as scholars have remarked, in which the private sphere was given public importance, or to put it differently, in a society in which the distinctions between the two spheres were blurred, so that what looked private was already public and what was deemed public was highly concerned with private issues.⁷⁷ According to Hannah Arendt, this new conception

⁷⁶ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The making of the Modern Identity*, 290-291.

⁷⁷ On this subject, see Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*; Towsey, "Women as Readers and Writers"; Spencer, "Women Writers and the Eighteenth Century Novel"; Eger et al., eds., *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*.

of public space blurred the straight separation that existed in ancient political thought between the public realm of the political and the private realm of the household. For her, the private became more and more public and politics transformed itself into something resembling housekeeping. While she deplores this invasion of the private into politics, with its economical orientation and its focus on the maintenance of life, there are reasons to see it as advantageous to women, who were able to participate to the new public sphere in a way that was forbidden for them in ancient times.⁷⁸

1.5 Why Eighteenth-Century Women Started to Write: The Economic Hypothesis

Even though eighteenth-century women's unprecedented involvement in reading and writing is generally recognized, the causes of this sudden and wide participation in literary production and public discussion is not as easy to determine. In *Living by the Pen*, Cheryl Turner insinuates that what might have brought women to read and write more than before was the life of leisure that they began to enjoy from the middle ranks to the highest ones. One might call this the *economic hypothesis*, because the increase in women's leisure time is represented as the result of the manufacture of most of the products that were previously made at home by women before industrialization. The beginnings of industrialization in England brought about the new image of the leisurely wife, whose domestic role was sometimes reduced to "sit[ing] above the parlor, receiv[ing] visits and drink[ing] tea" (Turner 42). This type of woman became an emblem of the middle classes and a sign of its ascendancy to economic and political power, because the superiority of one's family resided in the fact that women in it were not obliged to work. Ian Watt makes

⁷⁸For further reading on Hannah Arendt's acute analysis of the modern transformation of the old opposition between private and public spheres and the introduction of a third one, society, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 28-33.

a similar claim when he affirms that the “great increase in feminine leisure” that occurred around the mid-eighteenth century “had been made possible by an important economic change” (44). According to him, “the old household duties of spinning and weaving, making bread, beer, candles and soap, and many others, were no longer necessary, since most necessities were now manufactured and could be bought at shops and markets” (44). Watt also remarks, quite accurately, that women, provided with leisure time, could not partake in men’s public occupations such as politics, business, the administration of estates, hunting and drinking. Reading and writing would then occupy the vacant time that their leisure life afforded. Of course, activities other than reading and writing were available to fill the spare time of women from the middle and upper classes. In London, for instance, there were public amusements of all sorts, such as plays, operas, masquerades, assemblies, and there were, outside London, new watering-places and resort-towns where the idle women could gather in the summer. Nevertheless, as Ian Watt suggests, there was still plenty of time for them to read, notably for those with “puritan backgrounds ” (45).

1.6 The Spiritual/Religious Hypothesis

In addition to economic causes, there were also spiritual and religious reasons that might explain the increase in women’s writing and reading in the eighteenth century. The role played by Protestantism and, more importantly, by Puritanism, should not be underestimated. In fact, Puritan thought was closely tied to middle-class ideology and its new ideal of woman. Puritanism, which developed in England in the seventeenth century, was a particular branch of Calvinism, characterized by its emphasis on ordinary life and its special interpretation of predestination.⁷⁹ Its spiritual message was particularly appealing

⁷⁹ See Taylor 227-230.

to the middle classes because it was opposed to the dominant values of the aristocracy, a class they wished to equal and surpass.⁸⁰ Aristocratic values tended to belittle the ordinary labour that humans performed to meet their natural needs, such as trade and manual work of all sorts in favor of more refined and noble activities such as war, politics, and theoretical contemplation. The aristocratic vision of the world also devalued domesticity and private life in favor of public life, which was the realm of war and politics. This moral evaluation was seen by Puritans as an offense to God, who had given humans the means and the duty to preserve themselves through their industrious work and allocated to each of them a specific calling, by which their life gained meaning.

Moreover, although human salvation depended on God's grace, Puritanism strongly endorsed the belief that the ones who were saved by grace should strive through continuous effort to bring order to this disordered world to avoid God's displeasure. These constant exertions to redress the world, to preserve themselves and give meaning to their lives, implied for Puritan believers the possession of virtues such as discipline, sobriety, industry, order, economy, cleanliness and a perpetual avoidance of idleness and futility.⁸¹ This ethical outlook, even if it was based on the arbitrary and fundamental inequality between the saved and the damned, manifested itself, paradoxically, in an aspiration to equality, and was therefore, "plainly an endorsement of the serious, productive, pacific improver of any class (...) against the aristocratic, caste-conscious pursuit of honour and glory" (Taylor 240). Women surely benefited from the spirit of equality that stemmed from

⁸⁰ The association of Puritan values with the growing importance of the middle class is discussed by numerous scholars. On this subject, see Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*; Todd, *Sensibility. An Introduction*; Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People. England 1727-1783*.

⁸¹ For a clear and convincing argument about the close relationships between Protestant values and the rise of a capitalist economy, see Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

the Puritan ethic of work and merit. They were seen as being more susceptible than men to acquire the Puritan virtues of neatness, economy, piety, discipline, and useful work. Through the means of the domestic woman and her disciplined life, popularized notably in novels, the middle class was able to establish more easily its ideal of an orderly, industrious society.

Nancy Armstrong has insisted on the importance of the multiplication of conduct books and didactic novels dedicated to women in the promotion of an ideal type of woman. Through these conduct books and novels, Puritanism participated actively in the construction of this ideal, typically set in opposition to the aristocratic ideal, epitomized in Pamela and Clarissa, the two famous heroines of Richardson's novels, both of whom were avid writers and readers.⁸² Clarissa's scrupulous schedule detailed after her death by her inconsolable friend, Miss Howe, reveals that no time of her life was passed in idleness and that she devoted each hour of her existence to domestic, familial, and charitable duties, to reading carefully chosen books and writing letters to friends and relatives. She clearly embodies the Puritan values of work, discipline, and order, against the threats of idleness and mere entertainment. According to Clarissa, "no one could spend their time properly, who did not live by some rule: who did not appropriate the hours, as near as might be, to particular purposes and employments" (1470). Among the occupations to which a virtuous woman was supposed to apply herself figured writing, a domain in which women were sometimes viewed as superior.⁸³ Some passages in *Clarissa* clearly support this claim. For

⁸² The two novels alluded to are the two most famous works of Samuel Richardson. They were huge successes in their time and were particularly appreciated by women readers. *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* was Richardson's first novel and was published in 1740, followed by *Clarissa; or the History of a Young Lady* in 1747-1748.

⁸³ Many literary women in the eighteenth century were famous for their skills in letter writing; some of them were also accomplished diarists. Among them, one can find the letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, which

instance, in a letter to John Belford, Miss Howe relates that, for Clarissa, writing was as noble and useful an occupation for women as needlework, and that women even surpass the men in that art:

Who sees not, would she say, that those women who take delight in writing excel the men in all the graces of familiar style? The gentleness of their minds, the delicacy of their sentiments (improved by the manner of their education) and the liveliness of their imaginations, qualify them to a high degree of preference for this employment (Richardson 1468)

What is interesting in this panegyric of Clarissa's taste and character is how writing came to be envisaged, around 1747, as a proper and virtuous occupation for women, an occupation that could combat idleness and its propensity to produce all sort of dissipation, but also as an art in which women were particularly gifted.

1.7 How the Novel Slowly Gained Respectability: The Evolution of the Woman Writer's Status

Even if eighteenth-century middle-class women were not always certain of the propriety of reading and writing novels, the more the century advanced, the less they seemed to fear its detrimental potential. As some scholars have remarked, the dubious reputation of novels and of women novelists was due in large part to a reaction against the first wave of women novelists, who wrote plays and novels in which sexual desire was overtly present, and in which political issues of the day were discussed.⁸⁴ This was, of

were published in 1809 by her nephew and heir; and Hester Thrale's correspondence with Samuel Johnson, published in 1788, and her diary, titled *Thraliana*. The journals and letters of the novelist Frances Burney were also published posthumously in the nineteenth century. A more modern version by Joyce Hemlow and Lars E. Troide supplanted these earlier editions in the twentieth century.

⁸⁴ On this subject, see Turner 47-48; Spencer 215; Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800*, 4.

course, contrary to the new ideal of domesticity and womanhood that Puritan culture, embraced by the middle-classes, tended to disseminate. Instead of condemning completely and definitively the novel, a genre judged to be superficial, corrupting, and apt to develop inappropriate desires of adventure and romance in women, which would then lead to their downfall, more and more authors and novelists pleaded for a reform of the genre, which should be instructive, didactic, and present virtuous female characters as models to follow, and guides to appeal to.

In using novels to shape an ideal version of woman, these new women novelists attempted to elevate the representation of women and domesticity, which had often been debased in earlier forms of fictions.⁸⁵ According to Cheryl Turner, when women writers reappeared in the novel market after a short eclipse between approximately 1720 and 1744, they took care to distinguish themselves from their more rebellious predecessors. They generally aspired to the status of moral guides. In doing so, they hoped to gain respectability and thus to transform the perception of the novel form. This change is often alluded to as “the emergence of the Lady novelist” (Turner 51). Rapidly, people came to envisage didacticism as a “distinguishing feature of women’s fictions” (Turner 51). To be sure, novels could not exactly be regarded as equal to more serious genres such as conduct books or religious books, but people tended progressively to regard them as a form that could both “delight and instruct” (Armstrong 113). Women novelists, therefore, played an important role in the novel’s rehabilitation. This upgrade in women novelist’s image and its effect on the novel might also have contributed to encourage more women to write and to earn money through that profession. Middle-class women who were in a precarious

⁸⁵ See Armstrong 105.

monetary situation could now take the pen without incurring social reprobation. The money made by the sales of Frances Burney's third novel, *Camilla*, enabled her to buy a house for her family—her husband being an impoverished French émigré—while Charlotte Smith's novels were the only revenue on which her children and herself could count, her husband being improvident and unreliable.⁸⁶ As Virginia Woolf remarked, the late seventeenth-century writer Aphra Behn was very influential for later women novelists, because she was probably the first British woman to earn money and live off her writing. Although she lived an adventurous and unconventional life, she proved “that money could be made by writing” (Woolf 77) and that writing was not “merely a sign of folly and a distracted mind” (77) but something of “practical importance” (77). She undoubtedly paved the way for many women writers, who would come to see their writing activity as a profession and as an important source of income.

1.8 The Reasons for Women's Choice of the Novel

One is compelled to ask why eighteenth-century women writers preferred to write novels instead of poetry or drama. There is perhaps not a definitive answer to this question, but many hypotheses can be entertained. It might be argued, for instance, that women's preference for novels had social and economic roots. In eighteenth-century Britain, women were not educated in the same way as men. Their education remained, in general, more superficial and was destined principally to please their future husbands, entertain their guests and friends, notably with the display of artistic talents. Women could not attend university and their learning was generally—with the exception of those who had access to a well-furnished library or who had a father or a brother to teach them and guide them

⁸⁶ For more on the lives of Burney and Smith as novelists and how they supported themselves financially by the pen, see Harman, *Fanny Burney: A Biography*; Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography*.

in their readings—reduced to literature, foreign languages, history, and personal accomplishments such as playing music, drawing, painting, dancing, and doing needlework. Most women did not learn Greek and Latin and knew very little of the major classical works of the Greeks and the Romans. However, their relative ignorance of classical studies might have induced them to embrace a genre that was new and free from classical conventions, being more focused on the ordinary lives of women, children, and families.⁸⁷ It might also be argued that because domestic life was relatively quiet, and because it offered more leisure and consequently more time to observe and reflect, women became more attentive to other people's emotions and thoughts. This way of life and the perceptive qualities that it developed in women would have made them more apt to appreciate and write novels, a genre in which one would find acute descriptions of characters' feelings and thoughts.⁸⁸ The culture of letter writing by which women described their lives and feelings to friends and family, might also have helped them to develop certain novelistic skills.⁸⁹ Moreover, one must remember that eighteenth-century women did not usually engage in politics or economic pursuits. Therefore, what was left to them was a more inward-looking, reflective, and emotional life in which the fluctuations

⁸⁷ For more on classical conventions and the novel, see Watt 13-15. Watt also describes the novel as a genre that was particularly attentive to the minute details of individual life, especially concerning space and time, while Charles Taylor sees the novel as responding to the modern emphasis on ordinary life. See Watt 5-18 and 21-27; Taylor 286-287.

⁸⁸ This important trait of novels has been pointed out by numerous scholars. See Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*; Todd, *Sensibility. An Introduction*; Mullan, *Sentiment and Sensibility: The Language of Feelings in the Eighteenth Century*; Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*.

⁸⁹ As noted above, Towsey has pointed out how letter writing may have encouraged women to write novels and participate in the literary discussions of their time, while the heroines of Richardson's novels, Pamela and Clarissa, seemed to spend a significant amount of time writing letters. Moreover, notorious literary and intellectual figures such as Frances Burney, Hester Thrale and Lady Elizabeth Montagu wrote larger quantities of letters to their friends and relatives; these letters exhibit a high style and display literary skill.

of the heart were examined with minutae and detail.⁹⁰ In the eighteenth century, this inner life became the principal object of novels.

In addition to these social and cultural factors, there were also aesthetic reasons that might have rendered the novel particularly attractive to women in the eighteenth century. More precisely, I would like to argue that the novel's aesthetic qualities made this literary form more appropriate than others to express women's thoughts, feelings, and positions about important philosophical, moral, and political topics of their time. To make this point more clearly, I will begin with a general definition of the novel. As a literary genre, the novel has been defined by many scholars.⁹¹ Although they do not necessarily agree on all points, especially with regards to the novel's historical origins, certain aesthetic features of the novel are acknowledged by most scholars as constitutive of the genre.⁹² I will present and discuss some of these features in an attempt to explain why this specific genre might have been especially appealing to eighteenth-century women. While I will consider the specificity of eighteenth-century novels, I strive to formulate a definition that can apply to *all* novels. As specified in the introduction, I am committed to consistent thinking and logical categorization. However, I am also aware of the fact that my definition of the novel may appear to certain critics unhistorical, teleological, and overly general.⁹³ Even if

⁹⁰ Binhammer has argued that seduction narratives in the eighteenth century were preoccupied with epistemological questions concerning women and their ability to know their own hearts. For her, these investigations of the female heart reveal that woman were considered at the time as free agents, capable of making decisions for themselves. See Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in England*, 9-13.

⁹¹ See Lukàcs, *Theory of the novel*; Bakhtin, "Discourse in the novel" in *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*; Watt, *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*; Hunter, *Before Novels. The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century Fiction*; McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740*.

⁹² For Watt, the origins of the novel are to be found in eighteenth-century England, while for other critics such as Bakhtin and McKeon, the novel's beginnings can be traced back as far as late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Most of these critics recognize, however, that the novel form gained its definitive shape, and acquired greater popularity, from the Renaissance forward.

⁹³ See introduction, 7-8.

definitions remain relatively vague and cannot encompass perfectly all the diversity of novelistic productions, I argue that without a definition, one cannot even begin to think clearly about novels or to articulate an argument about their origin, cognitive value, and evolution. As to the sources that have helped me to shape my definition, some are restricted to the English novel, while others present more general theories of the novel. Because my focus is on the relationship between novels and philosophy, I have given more attention to theoreticians of the novel who have insisted on the imbrication of novels in philosophical discourse, who have studied novels philosophically, or who have explore their connections with philosophical thought. That is why, for instance, I turn to Ian Watt's characterization of the novel, despite the recent current that rejects his views as limited and restrained to a few, select canonical English works.⁹⁴ Despite these possible shortcomings, Watt, I suggest, skillfully shows how novels often demonstrated the features of modern philosophy. Finally, what interests me most in the various critical accounts of the novel, are the aesthetical features of the genre and the possibilities they allow their writers to explore.

According to Ian Watt, the central characteristic of the novel is "formal realism" (32).⁹⁵ For him, this trait is related to the modern vision of the world, which took form

⁹⁴ See Introduction, 7-8.

⁹⁵ Watt's claim that novels are mostly characterized by "formal realism," a feature associated with the emergence of middle-class values, has been discussed and criticized by scholars such as McKeon and Hunter. According to the former, Watt's insistence on formal realism makes him unable to account for the persistence of romance and aristocratic values in novels during the eighteenth century, while for the latter, the characteristics of subjectivity, individuality and realism introduced by Watt ought to be completed by other characteristics as well, such as the exploration of the unusual or the taboo, the intimate relation of the novel to its audience, and the novel "essential didacticism." It might be noted that, while being critical of some of Watt's assertions concerning the novel, neither of these scholars really bring into question the central traits that Watt attributed to the novel. The purpose of their criticism is to nuance or enrich Watt's characterization of the novel by adding certain features that were overlooked by him or to present a broader conceptual frame that could include works of fiction that did not fit into Watt's narrow definition of the novel. I agree with their critiques, but I still consider Watt's general claim about formal realism to be accurate, even if certain

around the seventeenth century in Europe, with the rise of “philosophical realism” (27). Following this philosophical movement, the novel intended to provide “a full and authentic report of human experience” (Watt 32) by means of narrative techniques, such as the rejection of tradition plots, a focus on individual human beings with real names, a concrete and precise reference to time and space, and the use of referential language. However, as Watt readily admits, realism remains an aesthetic convention. More precisely, realism presupposes the reader’s acceptance that the novel *is* an immediate imitation of individual experience, even though it is *not*. However, if the realism of novels is merely a convention, it is difficult to ignore that it succeeded more than any other genre in satisfying the reader’s demand for “a close correspondence between life and art” (Watt 33). Following the modern methodology introduced by Descartes and Locke, who rejected older and ungrounded assumptions about the self and the world, the novel, as a modern literary genre, had to be original and new, and it had to avoid repeating old models and conventions. As an innovative and experimental genre, without specific prescribed codes or conventions, the novel was nevertheless characterized by its focus on individuals, by its minute and concrete account of time, and by a concern for the correspondence of words to things. To perform this task, most novelists preferred a “descriptive and denotative use of language” (Watt 29) instead of “linguistic decorum” (29) and ornamental imagery.⁹⁶

novels diverged from that ideal, and if other features could be added to that general representation of the novel. Other critiques have been formulated against Watt by more recent scholars. I present them and analyze their relevance in the introduction. See introduction, 8-9. See McKeon 1-4; Hunter 30-45.

⁹⁶ The new concern for a strict correspondence between words and reality and the refusal of a rhetorical or poetical use of language in novels finds its source in Book III, Chapter IX of Locke’s famous work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. However, if this new realist orientation toward the use of language was very important in the eighteenth century, one should not forget that novels are not philosophical works and that their prose remained essentially distinct from that employed in more theoretical works. In *Love’s Knowledge*, Martha Nussbaum states, quite accurately, that all literary works, including novels, play with the possibilities of language. A metaphorical use of language remains necessary to render more appropriately the

Curiously, the search for realism in novels was compatible with another important characteristic of many eighteenth-century novels: didacticism. This feature of novels has long been ignored, perhaps because of a contemporary dislike for this type of work.⁹⁷ Even if not all eighteenth-century British novels were didactic, it was undoubtedly the case for many of them, notably the ones written by women.⁹⁸ Although moral claims are not factual evidence, a didactic novel is not necessarily an idealistic story. The combination of a realist claim with didactic intentions was in fact very frequent in eighteenth-century novels. Eighteenth-century didactic novels used realist depictions of characters and actions, alongside touches of irony and satire, to criticize certain moral and social attitudes of their time. For instance, the vulgarity of the Branghton's language and manners in Frances Burney's *Evelina* or the numerous ellipsis of Mr. Briggs' discourse in Burney's *Cecilia* appear quite realistic to the reader, and while they attest to the author's acute sense of observation and her talent for irony and satire, they also raise the question of these characters' moral worth. As a combination of realism and irony, moral didacticism in novels incites the reader to reflect on the moral failures of some characters. Yet, didacticism

differences that exist in real life between persons, situations, and emotions. For her, it is "through an inventive and original use of words" (5) that novelists can represent the concreteness and fullness of life. This position seems to contradict the one held by Watt, but they can be easily reconciled if we remember that originality, invention, and departure from older conventions were some of the novel's eminent characteristics and that what was rejected in the name of realism was not the use of metaphors and figures of style, but certain outdated conventions of writing that novelists found purely ornamental and artificial. See Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 4-10.

⁹⁷ Hunter is one of the first critics to mention didacticism as an important trait of the novel in its beginnings. (see 54-57). McKeon, for his part, makes a convincing case for the close relationship that existed between questions of truth and questions of virtue in the early British novel. (see 20-21)

⁹⁸ Todd's hypothesis for the omission of women writers in the eighteenth-century canon is that their work does not fit the general aesthetic canon, "which eschews the disparate, the sentimental and the moralistic" (*The Sign of Angellica* 6). She even affirms that due to certain social and historical circumstances, women's literary production was restricted to the moralistic and the sentimental. These constraints led eighteenth-century women writers to invent a specific 'feminine' form of novel that was didactic and sentimental. (see Todd 125). For my part, as I argue above, it is not possible to separate realism from didacticism in eighteenth-century novels. Moreover, it should be remarked that some literary men, such as Richardson, wrote sentimental novels, which contain manifest didactic purposes.

is not moral indoctrination and the moral judgment to be drawn from these novels is always left to the reader.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, another important aesthetic aspect of the novel when compared to other genres, is its *polyphony* and *heteroglossia*, or the way in which it combines in an organic and coherent whole a multiplicity of voices, languages, and styles.⁹⁹ For him, the novel is a dialogical genre because it is traversed by a multiplicity of languages and opinions that do not necessarily agree and that converse with one another. It produces multiple perspectives by which objects, situations, and actions can be depicted and understood. By contrast, poetry is, for Bakhtin, the expression of only one perspective about the world, formulated in one specific sort of language. The novel, on the contrary, expresses multiple points of view through different sort of languages, reflecting the social and economic differences that exist between people at a given period of time. Consequently, one will find in the novel a “stratification” of different languages reflecting social classes, groups, coteries, generations, genders, fashion trends, schools, professional jargons, political parties, and even the idiosyncratic dialects of singular individuals. This empirical and social description of different sorts of languages and the world perspective that they entail is typical of the novel’s realism. It also agrees with its rejection of linguistic ornament and literary conventions, and of its will to express the real language that people speak. For Bakhtin, the representation of a diversity of languages in a novel is also a means through which the novelist puts forth a critique of the conventional and normative way of speaking and thinking. The representation in novels of marginal types of languages offers a polemical and satirical stance through which common language and thought are

⁹⁹ “The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice,” writes Bakhtin (261).

criticized. Manipulating different forms of languages, the novelist creates a “double-voice” (Bakhtin 324) in which the discourse being represented is both the expression of the character’s thought and of the author’s critical perspective. According to Bakhtin, in satirical and comical novels, the critical distance from common language, thoughts, and values is obtained through the discourses of characters such as the rogue, the clown or the fool. For him, the fool is a character who betrays in his discourse an inability to grasp the conventions of society, or to understand “lofty-pathos-charged labels, things and events” (402). The incomprehension of the fool is always polemical because it aims at denouncing the pseudo-intelligence of common thought and “tears away” its “mask” (403). His simple-minded incomprehension becomes, in the hands of the author, a satiric attack on a centralized vision of the world that is both false and immoral. Comical languages and characters play an important part in the novels of eighteenth-century to early nineteenth-century prominent women authors such as Frances Burney and Jane Austen. Foolish characters are often used by these novelists to criticize conventional ideas of their time.

However, for Bakhtin, the unity of the novel is guaranteed by the author, who directly or indirectly puts forth his/her own vision of the world and of the good human life. The intervention of the author amidst the different voices that are represented in the novel is the source of the novel’s most innovative aesthetic discovery: *free indirect discourse*. Free indirect speech was first theorized by Charles Bally, a student of Saussure, in 1912, and subsequently by other linguists such as Etienne Lorck and Otto Jepherson. It designates a literary form that combines direct speech and indirect speech. It combines markers of indirect reported speech, such as the third person pronoun, with expressions and terms that relate to direct speech such as “now,” “here,” “there,” or exclamation marks. It conveys a

sort of indetermination between the narrator and the character, between exteriority and interiority.¹⁰⁰ Bakhtin does not use this specific term and refers instead to the harmonious blending of the author's voice with that of public opinion or with that of a particular social group or individual. This feature of the novel is very close to free indirect speech. While this characteristic can be found in novels that are not specifically humoristic, it is nevertheless an element of style that is, according to Bakhtin, typical of that kind of novel.¹⁰¹ This can be explained by the fact that imitation of languages is, according to him, generally parodic and that the source of humor often resides in the discrepancy between the public opinion around an issue and the author's perception of it. The subtle blending of two contrary positions or points of view in one sentence produces comic clashes, while the imitation of forms of jargon relative to individuals or groups is parodic and often ludicrous. This literary technique is envisaged by Bakhtin as a typical feature of eighteenth-century British novelists and their successors. As he claims, "The so-called comic novel makes available a form for appropriating and organizing *heteroglossia* that is both externally vivid and at the same time historically profound: its representatives in England are Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Dickens, Thackeray and others" (301). One may remark that Bakhtin does not include a single woman novelist in his list, even if eighteenth-century women writers such as Frances Burney and Jane Austen are renowned experts in these literary techniques. It seems to testify to the fact that, despite these women novelists' popularity and greatness, those who forged the official literary canon have long ignored them. Following important feminist readings of eighteenth-century British literature, I intend to revise this canon.

¹⁰⁰ See De Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*; Lorck, *Erlebte Rede: Eine sprachliche Untersuchung*; Jephersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar*.

¹⁰¹ See Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, 301.

However, my perspective is slightly different from these studies since my focus is on the aesthetic and stylistic innovations of these women authors and on their significant participation in the philosophical debates of the Enlightenment.¹⁰²

Among the novel's polyphonic techniques, for Bakhtin, stands the incorporation of expressions, adjectives, and other words coming from a specific language into a neutral authorial sentence. This technique enables the author to show the inner thoughts of characters by using the rhythm, the language, and the typical expressions of these characters, without explicitly attributing thoughts to them. The sudden intrusion of markers that belong to a specific way of speaking, or that are associated with a certain character, helps to perform the illusion that one is entering into someone else's mind and thoughts. This satisfies the realist need for a close correspondence with reality in its minutest details. At the same time, the presence of two voices in one sentence— (the author's and the character's)— is suggestive of a dialogue between these two figures. This technique illustrates Bakhtin's position according to which *heteroglossia* gives to the novel a dialogical and dynamic form, as opposed to the static, dogmatic, monological form characteristic of previous forms of writing.

The fact that the imitation of different sorts of languages is often parodic and comical leads us to another important aesthetic aspect of novels: irony. Theorists of the novel such as Bakhtin, Luckàcs, and Kundera agree that irony is one of the major features of the novel

¹⁰² The general erasure of eighteenth-century women writers from the literary canon has been criticized and explained by eminent feminist scholars of the 1980's and 1990's. See Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1660-1800*; Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: from Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*; Shevelov, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodica*; Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History*. Other feminist critics have lately revised some of their positions in an attempt to present a less uniform and rigid interpretation of women's literary production during the eighteenth century. See Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of the Woman Writer in Eighteenth-Century Britain*; Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism: 1780-1810*.

form. Irony, in general, reveals a discrepancy between a discourse and reality, and the revelation of this gap is one of the major objectives of the novel. Novels, as mentioned above, attempt to paint a world that corresponds with reality. Unfortunately, they also reveal how difficult this correspondence can be and how deceptive discourses can be. Irony reveals the gap between ideology and reality. Therefore, it implies a decentering from one's point of view, whether it belongs to the reader, the author or to one of the characters. For Bakhtin, "The novel begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world" (367). Through *heteroglossia* and free indirect speech, novels operate a distancing from one's central position. That is why, for Bakhtin, irony is precisely what makes the novel a typically modern and Galilean literary genre, because like Galilee, it distances itself from the dominant central perspective of an epoch, through the means of various and polarized perspectives, languages, and discourses.¹⁰³

In the novel, people's languages and perspectives are objectified. The form creates a distance, which estranges a person from herself and enables the reader to participate subjectively in the perspective of other social groups or people. The distance created between the reader and his/her own thoughts and beliefs, or between the author and the character's different perspectives are the means by which the novel questions and throws doubt on prominent ideological discourses, whether they are common, public, or relative to certain factions, professions or groups. This unsettling of ideologies is often performed through ridicule, or through the absurd consequences induced by the fictitious languages used by some characters.

¹⁰³ See Bakhtin 366.

For Milan Kundera, the irony of the novel, conceived as the distance it takes from the readers' opinions or from common ideologies, reveals the novel's skeptical position toward dogmatic truths. In the novel, every opinion can be doubted, revealing the uncertainty of the world.¹⁰⁴ While, at the beginning of modernity, some philosophical and scientific discourses claimed to put forward a unique and definitive representation of reality, Kundera holds that this was never the case with novels. For him, novels disclose the ambiguity of our world, and the fundamental uncertainty to which, as humans, we are bound in a world where no common ideology or religion can pretend anymore to dictate what humans should do and how they should live. Consequently, through irony, novels display what Kundera calls the "wisdom of uncertainty" (6), which can be defined as the acknowledgment of the impossibility to understand the world perfectly and totally, due to its fundamental complexity. For Kundera, irony stands against dogmatism. It contains a Socratic dimension, and is therefore philosophical, because it teaches to question the opinions, assertions and theories that are generally taken by most people as obvious.¹⁰⁵ Irony, unsettling our beliefs, reveals the ambiguity and contradiction of the world and asks the reader to reflect upon it.

Georg Lukàcs also perceives irony as a fundamental feature of the novel. For him, the novel, a specifically modern literary genre, reflects the disintegration of the world of ancient epics, in which humans were part of an integrated, unified *cosmos*, where everything had a place, and where there were no distinctions between interior and exterior,

¹⁰⁴ About the novel, truth and ambiguity, see Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Irony is an important feature of Socrates' method. For more on Socrates' use of irony, see Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, With Continual Reference to Socrates. in Kierkegaard's Writings. vol.II*; Vlastos, "Socratic Irony"; Morrison, "Reconsidering Socratic Irony," in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*.

subjectivity and objectivity.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the modern separation of the human subject from the world is the gap that the novel tries to overcome and that determines its fundamental tonality, which Lukàcs calls “transcendental homelessness” (5). Being alienated from the world, having no transcendental truth to hold on to and to guide his or her actions, the novel’s protagonist is homesick and tries to reintegrate the world or to imprint its subjectivity on it. According to Lukàcs, novels use irony to unsettle this movement toward unity. Irony reveals that the opposition between the subject and the world must remain, and that no definitive unity can be achieved. Nevertheless, this insurmountable duality becomes in novels a lively and dynamic source of “misunderstandings and cross-purposes, within which everything is seen as many-sided, isolated and connected, fragmentary and total” (Lukàcs 32). Irony seems therefore to fulfill the same role for Lukàcs than it does for Kundera and Bakhtin, that is, to decenter the reader from his/her own opinions and perceptions and to bring him or her to see the world through the multifarious perspectives of others. It develops the reader’s critical consciousness toward absolute truth or dominant ideologies. *In fine*, such an irony is impossible without polyphony, *heteroglossia* and the concreteness of realism.

The novel also has a specific way of interacting with its readers by provoking emotions of sympathy with respect to its characters’ fate and through the acknowledgment of their pain, pleasure, doubts, and fears. This engagement with literary works through the means of emotion and imagination has been discussed by authors such as Martha Nussbaum and Stanley Cavell.¹⁰⁷ While their analyses are concentrated mostly on tragic

¹⁰⁶ See Lukàcs. *The Theory of the Novel*, 24-30.

¹⁰⁷ These philosophers have discussed the relevance of novels and literary works as a means to overcome the limits of abstract thought and to grasp concrete, ethical and emotional knowledge. See Cavell, *The Claim of*

works of dramas, they can be applied to novels as well. Eighteenth-century British readers were especially attuned to notions of sympathy and the imagination in their reading of novels. When the novel appeared as a new literary genre in the early eighteenth century in England, it was, according to J. Paul Hunter, commonly acknowledged that the novelists established, compared to the authors of previous literary genres, a new kind of relationship with their readers. Their works were not directed at a *public*, communal audience, but rather aimed at *isolated individuals*, who often read in secrecy, partly because of the novel's dubious reputation.¹⁰⁸ As he explains, "readers of novels from the beginning tended to read in solitude, and novels from the beginning presumed to be dealing with one reader at a time rather than with a communal audience" (Hunter 40). This change in audience brought with it multiple effects: a closer identification with the novel's protagonist on the part of the reader, a growing sympathy with the fate of solitary heroes or heroines, and a sense of reality and authenticity, especially if the novel was written, as was often the case, from the first-person perspective, as in personal diaries and letters, and thus conveyed the impression of an autobiographical narrative. Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* is a good example of a first-person narrative that creates an impression of intimacy and closeness with its main character, while Samuel Richardson's novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, written in epistolary form, provide a similar kind of intimacy with their protagonists. The same can be said of Frances Burney's *Evelina*, another epistolary novel. In the eighteenth century, as mentioned above, many novelists and literary figures, such as Frances Burney, Hester Thrale, and Elizabeth Montagu, were also diarists and letter writers of great talent. Such a

Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism and Tragedy; *Must we Mean What we Say? A Book of Essays*; *Disowning Knowledge: in Six Plays of Shakespeare*; Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge, The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*.

practice might have helped some of them to give an impression of intimacy and immediacy to their literary works.

In *Love's Knowledge*, a work that examines closely the relevance of novels to our understanding of human life, Martha Nussbaum argues that novels construct a relationship with their readers that is intimate, responsive, participative, and emotional. For her, the novel demands that its readers engage personally with the text, bring their preoccupations to the reading, question the ideas expressed in it, and feel sympathy or pleasure in response to the characters' fate, through a process of identification—either with characters or with the narrator-author's perspective. In reading a novel, according to Martha Nussbaum, humans search for answers to their questions through the adventures of the characters they love. What she implies is that there is a certain kind of knowledge that can only be grasped by *love*, that is, through this affective disposition of sympathy that the reader feels for the characters' fortunes or misfortunes. Therefore, for Nussbaum, through the close and private relation that they establish with their readers, novels offer insight into truths that would not be revealed by another medium.

Stanley Cavell, for his part, claims that literary works in general help us to acknowledge what we cannot, in fact, logically and demonstratively know anything, and thus they save us from skepticism. Reason cannot demonstrate that the world and other people exist; it cannot prove that people have (or lack) certain feelings such as pain. To overcome the solipsism that can arise from this realization, Cavell suggests that humans must simply acknowledge the world, without proof, by responding to it by their actions and emotions. That is where, for him, literature has a tremendous role to play, for it teaches us to acknowledge other characters, their thoughts, values, and emotions and to respond to

their fate with emotions of pleasure or pain. Literary works can be seen therefore as a training in acknowledgment which will eventually help humans to acknowledge, not only fictional characters as if they were real, but also real humans in real life, and to respond to their claims. For him, literary works such as novels perform an epistemological task in replacing philosophical skepticism by the acknowledgment of others and the world.

Cavell refers mostly to Shakespeare's tragedies, but his theory applies to novels as well. In fact, this theory may apply more significantly to novels, because of the close connection and identification that humans feel with fictional/novelistic protagonists. This connection can be explained by the fact that the novel's hero or heroine is generally an ordinary individual, much like the reader, who lives a life that is not completely alien to its own, in a time and a space that are concrete and determined, instead of being abstract, mythologic and vague. It seems therefore that the formal realism of novels induces a closer connection and identification with their protagonists, which increases the sympathy and emotional response of readers, creating the ideal conditions for a decentralization from themselves and their opinions, which is at the basis of the novel's ironic stance, as well as of its epistemological value. For instance, in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, the mistakes, errors, and consequences of Tom's misguided decisions or actions are acknowledged and understood through the reader's affection towards this innocent and good-hearted young man.¹⁰⁹ The reader's feelings for Tom prevent him/her from feeling estranged from this

¹⁰⁹ Fielding readily points to Tom's little foibles and tries to render them sympathetic to the readers. Tom appears most of the time to be imprudent, flighty, and unsteady, but he is never bad or malicious. Fielding's strategy consists generally in presenting Tom's errors in the light of his good heart and candor. For instance, to explain why Tom is not at the beginning very receptive to Sophia's sentiments towards him, Fielding pleads Tom's previous attachment to another girl, inferior to Sophia in every aspect, but to whom he feels bound, and his total absence of desire for Mr. Western's money and property. His indifference for Sophia's perfections and his blindness regarding her partiality to him remains astonishing if not doubtful to the readers, but Fielding makes them understand it easily and thus pardon him. See Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 48-152.

imperfect character and to be harsh and judgemental towards him. As Mr. Finch famously declares in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, “you never really understand another person until you consider things from his point of view” (Lee 39). The sympathetic understanding that comes from taking someone else’s point of view is what novels enable us to achieve.

It may be surmised that the realism that is characteristic of novels might have been particularly appealing for eighteenth-century women, since it made it possible for them to talk and hear about their everyday lives in a literary narrative, and to imagine themselves as the heroines of a story, instead of hearing about past heroes and great personages of mythology or Antiquity. Moreover, one should remember that women had very limited access, compared to men, to classical education and that Rome and Ancient Greece might not have appeared very familiar nor very close to their lives.¹¹⁰ Because the novel departs from traditional plots and classical heroes, as well as from the traditional language used in such works, it became a more attractive and accessible genre for women. It should also be noted that the search for originality that is characteristic of novels, might have also been very appealing to them, because it lay before them a whole new territory to explore, and a new medium with which to experiment. Moreover, this new literary genre did not depend on any previous code or tradition, from which women would have been estranged because of their education. In addition to these advantages, the novel enabled them to write about their families, friends, and neighbours, about their lives in the home and outside, and about matrimony and the risks of spinsterhood, which were matter of great concern for them. In

¹¹⁰ Of course, there were exceptions. Some eighteenth-century women managed to master Greek and Latin and to read and translate classical texts. Some of them were even famous for their extraordinary accomplishments, such as Elizabeth Carter, who translated the *Discourses* of Epictetus into English.

short, they could write about all these trivial, day-to-day preoccupations because through the novel, all these elements became, during this time, objects worthy of representation.

One can also suppose that the decentralization that novels performed through means such as polyphony, parody, and irony, might have represented for a marginalized group such as women, an opportunity to reveal their voice and their point of view, against the general and common one, and to raise doubts about the rightfulness of dominant views about issues of gender, morality, and education. Irony in novels can be a powerful means for marginalized groups, such as women, when they want to question the authority of the official discourse and to problematize their own assumptions about themselves and the world. Since the last decades of the twentieth century, an important number of critics have manifested interest towards eighteenth-century women writers and denounced their previous neglect in literary history. They have explored how many women novelists, embodying in themselves and representing through their heroines the new set of feminine qualities, such as domesticity, modesty, and chastity, which arose around the mid eighteenth-century, managed at the same time to challenge and critique these alleged feminine traits. My work owes a lot to their pioneer works on that subject. Nevertheless, I agree with Betty A. Schellenberg that these authors also contributed to perpetuate the perception that mid-eighteenth-century women novelists and their works endorse the general assumptions about gender, common in this period.¹¹¹ Accordingly, I would like to draw an important distinction between the heroines, the author, and the other female characters in these novels. My purpose will be to show, as evoked above, that the ideal of domesticity was not only a repressive ideal, but also a vector of emancipation. I will also

¹¹¹ See Schellenberg 3.

claim that secondary characters may often express more than the main protagonist the author's complex view about gender differences.

One must also remember that the novel develops a close emotional relationship with its readers, which implies sympathy and acknowledgment of others, and that this relationship enables the novel to display another form of knowledge, emotional and concrete, responsive and attentive to particulars, that was different from the one that belonged at that time to science and philosophy. Yet, in the eighteenth century, few women were trained in the objective, neutral stance of modern philosophy and empirical science. What was probably considered a defect for them might have enabled them, nevertheless, to approach ethical and epistemological questions differently, in a way that was less abstract and more concrete, and that used emotions and sympathy, instead of logical demonstration. Women may have been encouraged to develop, because of their education and situation in society, another form of knowledge that we may define temporarily as an understanding of reality based on our imaginative powers and emotional capacities, which prompts our responsiveness to situations and our acknowledgments of people's feelings and actions. Because the novel is situated exactly on the same epistemological level, it might have appeared as the most appropriate genre for women and as the ideal form in which to express their doubts, critiques and positions concerning the main philosophical, moral, and political issues of their time.

Chapter Two

The Cognitive Dimension of Literary Texts

2.1 The Old Quarrel between Philosophy and Literature: Plato's and Aristotle's Positions

The central claim of this dissertation is that eighteenth-century women novelists used the novel to express, discuss, and challenge the main philosophical ideas of their time. These philosophical ideas, although they circulated in the common culture, originated for the most part from male philosophers. While men chose to express and demonstrate their ideas in philosophical essays, women seemed to prefer literary if not aesthetic forms of expression. In chapter one, I explain why the novel form was more accessible and appealing to women compared to philosophical essays. In the introduction, I describe how and to what extent these women writers, particularly the ones whose works I analyze, might have been in contact with philosophical ideas, directly or indirectly.¹¹² In this chapter, I examine more generally how novels can be appropriate means to discuss and express philosophical positions. My contention, that eighteenth-century women used the novel to discuss philosophical topics, depends, therefore, on an adequate answer to that question. As I explain in the introduction, this difficulty is not one that could be easily swept away as trivial or superficial. It is indeed a great matter of contention for philosophers in the area of aesthetics and a problem that bear a deep epistemological value.¹¹³ The examination of this problem involves therefore a necessary examination of the differences between philosophy and literature, and a close analysis of their common claim to contain and express “truth” or knowledge and to impart it to their readers. In consequence, the capacity of literary works to provide knowledge and attain truth shall be investigated. In doing so, what I would like to state is the relevance of literary works to the process of

¹¹² See introduction, 34-35.

¹¹³ See introduction, p.35-36.

learning, which cannot be entirely undertaken through abstract theoretical treatises. In this regard, my major claim will be that philosophical knowledge about human life remains incomplete and partially ineffective without literature. More precisely, I will argue that the epistemic role of literature consists in providing an occasion to test and prove certain philosophical theories, to contextualize abstract propositions, and to achieve, on the part of the reader, a more complete understanding of human life.

Literature, especially poetry and drama, has been at odds with philosophy since Plato's famous rejection of the poet from his ideal city in *The Republic*.¹¹⁴ In this work, Plato criticizes poetry's ability to teach people how to live and act virtuously. Plato's denial of poetry's wisdom is based mostly on its imitative nature and on its deleterious influence on the passions. For him, poetry is ontologically and epistemically inferior to philosophy, because it is an imitation of an imitation. Instead of representing the real—the Ideas—it mimics what is already a mere copy of it: the objects around us, or the individuals, who act and feel.¹¹⁵ Therefore, it produces only appearances, not reality. Moreover, poetry addresses itself to the passions, instead of reason, and consequently encourages immoderate behaviors led by appetites and emotions.¹¹⁶ Finally, the poet, like the sophist, knows nothing about the things he imitates. He pretends to know things, but he is only mirroring them.¹¹⁷ Therefore, Plato thinks that only philosophy can attain a real knowledge of the notions that are important to human life, such as virtue and justice. To attain this knowledge, the philosopher must reach the Ideas, which are the true essences of all things.

¹¹⁴ Plato intends to censure great parts of Homer's poems and restrict good poetry to "hymns to the gods and praises of famous men" (Plato, *The Republic* 571 606c-607d).

¹¹⁵ See Plato, *The Republic*, 559-560, 597d-598c.

¹¹⁶ See Plato, *The Republic*, 571, 606c-607d.

¹¹⁷ See Plato, *The Republic*, 557, 596a-596e.

For that purpose, he or she must use reason only and detach herself from her senses and emotions. Therefore, the philosopher does not imitate the empirical world and its objects but aims instead at the intelligible world and its universal Ideas. This task requires that, in the philosopher's mind, reason rule over the passions. Consequently, a philosopher is one who lives a measured and rational life. According to Plato, only a person who has gone beyond the world of sensible appearances to attain the idea of the just, the good and the beautiful, has a real knowledge of these objects and can therefore speak about them and act accordingly.¹¹⁸ The absence of real knowledge in poetry and the fact that it shows appearances instead of reality makes it akin to rhetoric, while philosophy belongs to science. It seems, for Plato, that literature cannot provide any true insight about human life.

Of course, there were philosophers in the history of philosophy who refused to recognize that literature can impart knowledge of any sort. Fortunately, this was not the case for all of them. Since Aristotle, many philosophers have held that literature and art can provide knowledge, although in a different way than philosophy or mathematics. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle argues against his master, Plato, and affirms that tragedy, conceived as an imitation of persons in action, is a source of knowledge and that humans, from childhood onward, learn from representation.¹¹⁹ He even attributes the pleasure produced by artistic imitation to the knowledge they display. Some scholars also attribute the famous cathartic effect of tragedy to the cognitive illumination it provides.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ The image of the cave illustrates the necessity for one who wants to acquire knowledge, to quit the world of sensible appearances and ascend to the intelligible world of true essences or ideas. See Plato, *The Republic*, Book VII, 455-456, 515a-518c.

¹¹⁹ See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 6 (4, 1448b).

¹²⁰ Following Leon Golden, Martha Nussbaum develops a cognitive interpretation of Aristotelian catharsis. For her, emotions of pity and fear reveal to us important things about human life that we would have ignored

Interestingly, Aristotle affirms that poetry is close to philosophy because both aim at universals instead of particulars. The difference between them lies in the modality of their objects. Whereas philosophy refers to *real beings*, literature imitates what is merely *possible*.¹²¹ Even if Aristotle does not say so, one might infer that this difference also arises from the faculties on which they depend: literature is mostly a product of the imagination, while philosophy relies principally on reason. However, one should nuance the conception of universality that poetic imitation involves. Poetic universality remains, for Aristotle, more concrete than the universal concepts of philosophical discourse, because the characters and the actions it imitates are not general forms or abstract ideas, but concrete and determinate possible individual types.

2.2 Some Differences between Philosophy and Literature

This dissertation accepts as its premise Aristotle's position about literary cognitivism. However, before arguing more precisely in favor of literary knowledge and responding to the skeptical arguments that are classically opposed to that position, it is first necessary to show how philosophy and literature are indeed different things. Some may argue that we have taken this distinction for granted. They may also argue that nothing prevents us from considering every written text as literature, even a philosophical treatise. Such a loose conception of literature — although not entirely wrong, when considered at a general level — threatens to induce confusion between genres that ought to be distinguished with respect to their methods, their use of language and their general

without them. For her, “tragedy contributes to human self-understanding precisely through its exploration of the pitiable and the fearful” (Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness* 390). For a more detailed account of the argument, see Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 390-400.

¹²¹ Aristotle maintains, “It is, moreover, evident from what has been said, that it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened but what may happen, what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity” (Aristotle, *Poetics* 11 9, 1451 b).

objective. Such distinctions are important as to the sort of cognitive claims these texts or discourses make. For instance, a scientific text does not use language in the same way as a literary one and what it refers to is not fictional or invented: its concern, rather, is things of this world. It aims at empirical truth, whereas literature, if it may contain truths about human life, is not a description of empirical phenomenon. The same can be said about philosophical texts, which use language discursively and perform logical demonstrations, avoiding metaphors or polysemic ambiguity. To reduce every text to literature might then have the consequence of rendering scientific discourse fictive or philosophic texts poetic and metaphoric, denying the specificity of the sort of knowledge each of them tries to attain. To dispel that confusion and prevent its detrimental consequences, we must consider, first, as Plato and Aristotle state that literature is a kind of art, while philosophy is not. According to Aristotle, literature is “an art which imitates by means of language alone” (Aristotle, *Poetics* 4). For Martha Nussbaum, contrary to philosophy, literature involves a creative use of words, producing images and metaphors, by which complex and profound meanings are conveyed. On the contrary, philosophy does not aim at exploring and exploiting the multiple resources of language. Aiming at clarity and precision in its use of words, the philosophical text often offers definitions of the specific meaning it attributes to the concepts it uses. Consequently, philosophical texts are in general less creative in their use of language as they try to avoid figurative meaning and polysemy. Furthermore, philosophical texts follow logical rules instead of narrative rules; they are not concerned with rhythm or verse. *In fine*, one can say that philosophy does not consider language aesthetically, but more as a means of communication and demonstration. Therefore, philosophy is different from literature because it is not an art. I therefore agree with Peter

Lamarque, who defines literary works as art, because they are “artefacts or designs of some kind, exhibiting an “artistry,” comparable with some respects to other arts, and capable or affording distinct kinds of pleasure” (16). Since philosophical texts do not correspond to that definition, we can easily conclude that they are not artistic in the same way as literary works.

Some eminent thinkers, however, have challenged this distinction, claiming that philosophy is indeed a kind of literature and that there are no major differences between a novel and a philosophical treatise. Poststructuralist theorists such as Derrida and Barthes, or pragmatist philosophers such as Richard Rorty, are common defenders of this view. Derrida, influenced by Nietzsche and his claim that all philosophical concepts were previously genuine metaphors which have declined into fixed conventional forms of meaning, contends that philosophical texts are therefore fundamentally metaphoric, and therefore literary.¹²² Barthes and other semioticians, for their part, refuse to endorse what is usually considered as the principal difference between literary texts and philosophical ones, that is, their relation to the world and their claim to say something true about it. For them, all texts are opaque and self-sufficient things that do not relate to the world, and cannot aspire to any sort of truth.¹²³ According to this perspective, words do not relate to objects in the world or to emotions or ideas in the mind, because objects, ideas or emotions *do not exist* prior to the words that express them. Reference is therefore an “illusion” or a “fallacy.”¹²⁴ Consequently, all texts, whether philosophical, literary, commercial,

¹²² See Derrida, “Le retrait de la métaphore,” 273-300.

¹²³ As Barthes famously asserts, “what goes on in a narrative is, from the referential (real) point of view, strictly *nothing*. What does happen is language per se, the adventures of language, where advent never ceases to be celebrated” (*An introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative* 27).

¹²⁴ On that subject, see Barthes, *Mythologies*; Riffaterre, “Interpretation and Undecidability,” 227-242.

journalistic, etc., have nothing to say about the world and do not refer to anything in it. In this context, philosophy cannot distinguish itself from literary texts or from any texts at all, because all texts whatsoever are reduced to the same level of opacity and self-sufficiency. Their meaning is left to each reader and his or her idiosyncratic interpretation of it.

These views generate numerous problems, which philosopher Arthur Danto addresses seriously in his article “Philosophy as/and/of Literature.”¹²⁵ Danto observes keenly that behind the attempt to subsume the philosophical text and any other specific text under the general label literature lies a questioning of humans’ ability to formulate truths about the world. As he says, “philosophy-as-literature” (Danto 153) seems opposed to “philosophy- as-truth” (153), because the style in which a philosophical text is written would then matter more than the “truths” it is supposed to express. However, Danto willfully admits that the style in which a philosophical text is written is not completely irrelevant and should be considered carefully by its readers if they want to understand the specific kind of truth it conveys. Therefore, instead of questioning the importance of style in philosophical texts, Danto concentrates his argument on the possible implications of this self-sufficient and anti-truth thesis with regards to literature itself. He argues that the reduction of philosophy to literature is based on a false assumption, that is, that literature in general is something completely alien to the world and potentially meaningless to its readers. Contrary to that, he argues strongly for the existence of both literary and philosophical knowledge. Although similar, these two genres remain for him distinct, largely because of literature’s metaphorical and fictive form.

¹²⁵ See Danto, “Philosophy as/and/of Literature,” 151-176.

According to Danto, the famous *referential fallacy* has estranged both literature and philosophy from the world as well as from any intentional meaning on the part of the author. This theory sees references in literature or in texts in general as being only horizontal, and as rejecting the vertical relation that prevails in science and logic. A vertical reference implies that a word or a sentence refers to the world, while a horizontal one suggests that words and sentences refer only to other words and sentences within an independent and autonomous text. According to Danto, this opposition might present a false dilemma. He suggests that there might be another sort of inference as well, a Z coordinate, in addition to the X and Y of verticality and horizontality. This new coordinate might account for the sort of reference one finds in literature and in philosophy. For him, the Z coordinate consists in the intimate relationship that both philosophy and literature have with their readers. For him, philosophy resembles literature precisely because the “truths” it contains are recognized and understood only through the act of reading. In both sort of texts, the readers experience and recreate for themselves the truth of the text each time they read it. This recognition is possible because the truth that the readers grasp is also, at the same time, a truth about themselves. Therefore, in addition to a vertical reference to the world and a horizontal reference to the text itself, literature and philosophy also share a reference to their readers, who, transformed by their reading, come to know the world and themselves better.

If, as Aristotle insisted, philosophy and literature are both about universals,¹²⁶ this universality, for Danto, manifests itself through the reader. For him, the meaning of a text does not depend on any arbitrary individual interpretation but goes beyond relativism and

¹²⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics*, p.11 (9, 1451b).

mere idiosyncrasy to attain a sort of *intersubjective universality*. To put it differently, the truth conveyed by these texts cannot become intelligible for each of us without our subjective appropriation of it through reading. However, if each reading is subjective, it shares some common features with the readings of others, with whom we may have a conversation about the opinions expressed in the texts. Therefore, one can affirm that each reader forms a community with other readers and that what one captures individually about a text is not entirely alien to the reading experience of others. In this regard, as Danto contends:

(...) philosophy functions just as literature does, not in the sense of extravagant verbal artefacts, but as engaging with readers in search of that sort of universality I have supposed to characterize literary reference: as being about the reader at the moment of reading through the process of reading (Danto 174)

Nonetheless, Danto believes that philosophy remains distinct from literature because it is neither *metaphorical* nor *fictional*. The claim that philosophy is not fictional is easy to accept, even if we all know that some philosophical texts, notably Plato's dialogues, resort to some myths or fictions for pedagogical purposes. The other claim, according to which philosophical prose is not metaphorical, needs further clarification, since, as we have seen, it is a point of contention amongst certain philosophers. Contrary to Richard Rorty's opinion, Danto asserts that philosophical and scientific concepts are not mere metaphors or creative "re-descriptions."¹²⁷ For him, philosophical concepts evolve

¹²⁷ In his work, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty denies that there is a world outside language to which it can refer. Consequently, for him, scientific theories or philosophical concepts are nothing else but

from a structural hypothesis that might look like a metaphor within a more definite and technical form in which their meaning is clearly circumscribed. What may look like a metaphorical expression in philosophy is thus a transitory state, which will develop into a precise formulation. However, philosophical concepts, if they are not originally and intrinsically metaphors, for Danto, can become metaphorical, when their truth ceases to be recognized. This is the case, for example, for Epicurus' hooked atoms or for Descartes' animal spirits. According to Danto, when philosophical concepts become metaphors, it is, most of the time, because people have ceased to consider them as true hypotheses. From this perspective, their status as literature is "a consolation prize for failing to be true" (Danto 174).

2.3 Literature and Knowledge: Some Points of View

If literature, as a genre, features an artistic and metaphorical use of language distinct from the language used in philosophical texts, it remains essential to ask whether it can, as philosophy pretends to do, convey some truths or knowledge about the world. As explained above, in early Greek philosophy, Plato denied to literature any cognitive content, while Aristotle, on the contrary, supported the idea that literary imitations were a source of cognition. Analytical philosophers of the early twentieth century tended to agree with Plato on this question. Their rejection of literary cognition was based on their suspicion not only of any discourse that was symbolic or metaphoric, but also of the fictitious nature of novels and plays. To illustrate the extremity and narrowness of their position, one might look to Bertrand Russell's famous declaration about Shakespeare's

mere "re-descriptions" of the world, arising from the decline of old expressions and the need to form conceptions and images that seem more adapted to new circumstances. From that perspective, science, and philosophy function as literature, because they do not progress in their knowledge of the world; they only create new words, new expressions, and metaphors to describe it.

character, Hamlet. Russell declared that “the propositions in the play are false because there was no such man” (qtd. in Huemer 234).

This somewhat astonishing position relies on a certain conception of knowledge, conceived as a process by which data or facts are accumulated and stored.¹²⁸ Such a conception was prominent in the early analytical tradition and was driven by a very narrow conception of truth, understood as being strictly propositional and referential. Fortunately, a new wave of philosophers questioned these strict assumptions regarding literature’s capacity to reveal truths and contain knowledge about human life. Without diminishing or ignoring the specific value of scientific and philosophical conceptions of truth and their way of envisaging how humans acquire knowledge—and in contrast to poststructuralists, who tend to deny that there is any truth or knowledge anywhere— they consider seriously the possibility that literature may convey a *different type* of knowledge and truth. According to John Gibson, this new philosophical current may be termed *literary cognitivism*.¹²⁹ However different their perspectives may be, all these philosophers raise the same problem, asking how literature, although fictitious, is able to “say something of cognitive consequence about reality” (Gibson, *Sense of the World 2*). This problem is not merely epistemological. It also concerns the mysterious “relationship between literature and life” (Gibson, *Sense of the World 1*) that underlies the “wordly interest” (1) people take in works of literature, as they acquire through their reading an increased and augmented understanding of life and the world.

¹²⁸ Both Wolfgang Huemer and Catherine Elgin criticize the narrowness of these traditional conceptions of truth and knowledge. See Huemer, “*Why Read Literature?*,” 234-235; Elgin, “The Laboratory of the Mind,” 44-46.

¹²⁹ See Gibson. “The Prospects of Literary Cognitivism,” 1.

Hilary Putnam sparked an interesting discussion of literary cognitivism in his 1976 article “Literature, Science and Reflection.”¹³⁰ According to him, literature provides us with *hypotheses*. These hypotheses are about human life and the fundamental problem of how to live. Presenting pictures of specific human lives, literature trains our imaginations and makes us envisage, through characters, actions, and situations, *what life would be like if* we were a certain type of person living in specific conditions. For him, the ability to envisage different possibilities and point of views about human life are at the basis of moral and practical reasoning in general. Therefore, he claims that literature can be a powerful means to develop our practical and moral reasoning and that this function operates principally through the workings of imagination.

Yet, Putnam remarks that the role of the imagination has been “systematically ignored or downplayed by the philosophical tradition” (485). For him, the denial of the imagination has been detrimental to our understanding of practical reasoning. He explains that to judge and reflect about moral situations is not only a logical process; it also involves “our full capacity to imagine and feel, in short, our full sensibility” (485). If imagination is necessary for practical reasoning, then literature might be of tremendous importance to the perfection and development of moral judgment. According to Putnam, literature provides us with the opportunity to reflect on human life through the representation of *imaginative possibilities*, which present us with *moral perplexities*. However, moral perplexities are not moral obligations or solutions. For Putnam, literary texts do not advocate for a moral position and do not provide the reader with solutions, but indirectly suggest possibilities

¹³⁰ See Putnam, “Literature, Science, and Reflection,” 483-491.

and varied perspectives in order to enable him or her to think about his or her own life and reflect upon it.

Consequently, the knowledge of humanity that one might find, for instance, in novels, is not, for Putnam, a scientific knowledge of humans, but a practical or a moral one. This difference is due to the method used in scientific and moral knowledge. A scientific knowledge of humans relies on a hypothesis that has been empirically tested and proven right. This sort of proof is not available through the moral or practical hypothesis provided by literary texts. More precisely, moral, and practical questions cannot be resolved through empirical testing or logical proofs. They are, for Putnam, objects of reflection and speculation based on imagined possibilities, which give rise to various hypotheses. Practical knowledge is therefore obtained by a type of reasoning that involves the full participation of the imagination and the emotions in order to grasp what it would be like to be a particular person in a particular predicament and how one would potentially feel in that situation. If, according to Putnam, the main moral or practical question is how to live, this question might not be resolved through empirical testing or logical proof, but rather through a faculty of judgment trained and enlarged by the imagination. Putnam's position recalls Aristotle's assertion that poetic imitation is about possibilities, while philosophy is about realities. It might not surprise us, therefore, to find that Aristotle was probably the first Greek philosopher to confer to the imagination a positive role in the acquisition of knowledge, just as his contemporaries suspected it to be a mere source of illusions.¹³¹

¹³¹ See Kalaitzidis, "Imagination et imaginaire chez Aristote," 7. For more information on the role of imagination in Greek philosophy, see Bundy, "The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought"; Starobinski. "Remarques sur l'histoire du concept d'imagination," 17-29.

The philosopher Catherine Z. Elgin also advocates strongly for the importance of the imagination and the relevance of literary works of fiction in the constitution of knowledge and the process of learning.¹³² She goes even further than Putnam by affirming that literature performs a certain kind of – decidedly unempirical – *testing*. However, she contends that we cannot advocate for literary cognitivism if we adhere to the narrow and conventional conception of knowledge that has dominated until very recently in the philosophical tradition. She affirms that it is necessary for us to enlarge this conception of knowledge, which she describes as an “information-transfer model of cognitive progress” (Elgin, *Laboratory of the Mind* 44) inherited from rationalist and empiricist philosophers. According to this model, shared by prominent figures such as Descartes and Locke, learning is a passage from knowing nothing or little, to knowing something, with each new bit of knowledge gained adding itself to the previous stock already possessed. As she argues, if acquiring knowledge really does amount to that sort of progressive collection of information, literary fiction cannot play a great role in it. Therefore, for Elgin, this model is a “misleading and narrow conception of cognition” (Elgin, *Laboratory of the Mind* 44). As she observes, a list of data is not knowledge until we can make sense of it by drawing links between these pieces of data and organize them into some coherent organic whole. Therefore, the problem of knowledge is not, according to her, about how to gain new information, but how to organize and synthesize the information we already have. This task often means discarding some pieces of information as irrelevant and searching for ones that are more meaningful. As she formulates it, the problem of knowledge is therefore

¹³² See Elgin, “The Laboratory of the Mind ,” 43-54 and “Reinventing Aesthetics, Reconceiving Cognition,” 43-54.

to determine “which information should be ignored, which retained, and how to organize what we retain” (Elgin, *Laboratory of the Mind* 44).

C. Z. Elgin admits that to select, among the multiple features that a single object possesses, which feature is salient, remains a difficult task. To justify our choices, we usually return to effective and long-tried methods. However, despite the use of these methods, a doubt might persist about the accuracy of the results. We may have overlooked certain important features of an object. Therefore, when the representation that we have of a certain phenomenon does not seem to apply to all situations, we usually reconsider our knowledge of it. For Elgin, this reconsideration seeks to reconfigure the properties or features of this phenomenon by imagining what it could look like if some aspects of it that have been overlooked were now brought to the fore.

As she observes, reconfigurations are not always interesting or relevant. That is why humans have invented ways to test their accuracy and usefulness for the acquisition of knowledge. To recognize worthwhile reconfigurations, science uses experiment to test their validity. The purpose of experiments is therefore to see if the new salient features brought about by these reconfigurations are meaningful and truthful. What Elgin wants, therefore, to argue concerning literature or fiction is that it also displays an experiment of its own. She calls this literary experiment a “thought experiment” in which hypotheses about life and the world are tested. To understand better what she means by these literary thought experiments, we must recall that, for her, each experiment is an *exemplification*. According to her, an exemplification is “a familiar device by which a sample refers to the properties it is a sample of” (Elgin, *Laboratory of the Mind* 47). More precisely, exemplification is a means to present concretely some aspects of a phenomenon.

Therefore, one might say that an experiment *exemplifies* certain features of a phenomenon in order to test their significance and their consequences. In doing so, it does not aim to replicate what really happens in real life, but rather to select and isolate the features on which it wants to focus. It must be noted that it is assumed that what is true in a controlled situation, that is, in an experiment, should be true in the real world. However, thought experiments differ from empirical and scientific ones, because their hypotheses cannot be tested empirically. We have therefore to imagine it. Of course, science and philosophy also use thought experiments, but what Elgin argues is that literature displays far more “extended, elaborate thought experiments” (*Laboratory of the Mind* 48).

While philosophical thought experiments remain abstract and austere, literary thought experiments have the specificity of being thick descriptions of events that function *symbolically*. Works of fiction are thus “semantically dense” (*Laboratory of the Mind* 49) because they involve many factors, such as character, action, and circumstance. These selected features form a complex picture that brings to the fore certain patterns, connections, properties or irregularities. For example, Elgin reminds us how Jane Austen, in restricting her novels to three or four country families, drew on a selection of characters, actions and situations that enabled her to reveal certain psychological and social traits as well as moral perplexities that she would not have been able to render salient and significant in a larger socio-political context, implying numerous characters issued from diverse social classes, cultures or countries. Even if literary thought experiments select characters, psychological traits, actions, and settings, they remain nevertheless richer than the abstract thought experiments that philosophers usually construe.

Moreover, Elgin argues that literary thought experiments present us with multiple perspectives, many of which contradict each other, or are alien to our own. While philosophy and science aim at presenting an objective, impartial, and universal representation of objects, as if they arise from a “view from nowhere” (Nagel qtd. in Elgin, *Laboratory of the Mind* 51), works of fiction invite the reader to adopt the perspectives of others and see the world as others see it. While philosophical epistemology usually favors an objective point of view for the attainment of knowledge, particular and subjective points of view are not completely irrelevant to our understanding of the world, notably when it concerns human life. As Elgin writes, “we live in a world with other people” (51) and it can become epistemically relevant to understand, for example, how one who benefits from an act of generosity perceives it or how the benefactor feels about his generous act. In adopting someone else’s perspective, readers of literature can see things that they would necessarily have missed if they were restricted to their own particular perspective. For instance, the reading of Nabokov’s *Lolita* offers the reader a glimpse into the distorted, yet poetical and tragic perspective of Humbert Humbert with respect to his desperate and forbidden love. It is doubtful that other means could have enabled the reader to enter such a perspective and understand it.

C. Elgin also argues that literary works can unsettle our own previous convictions by revealing contradictions or tensions in our own beliefs. To elaborate on her point, she turns to a well-known Jane Austen character, Fanny Price. The reader of *Mansfield Park* may think that Fanny is a prig, while being forced to admit at the same time that her moral point of view is impeccable. Therefore, she may be obliged to revise her previous assumptions about the likable quality of what is morally good and admit that one can dislike

persons for reasons that have nothing to do with their moral worth. Therefore, as Elgin observes, “in dislodging unfounded claims, fiction can advance cognition” (52). *In fine*, even if novels are undoubtedly works of fiction and their narratives do not purport to be true nor to be considered as such, they are for Elgin important means of knowledge because they “enable us to see or recognize truths that we might otherwise miss” (53).

Some philosophers have attributed the cognitive dimension of literature to its profound knowledge of language itself. According to W. Huemer, literature can teach “people to talk” (233). To understand exactly what “learning to talk” might mean, Huemer suggests that we depart from the conventional and narrow conception of language and knowledge developed by early philosophers of language to embrace a wider one, which would enable us to assert the epistemic relevance of literary works. According to the traditional representation of knowledge, humans learn mostly by accumulating true propositions about the world. In this context, language consists mostly of propositions that refer directly to certain exterior objects. According to this theory of language and knowledge, literary texts present a problem, because they contain propositions that do not refer to anything that exists in the world. In consequence, literary texts cannot provide real knowledge. This position, however, seems radically at odds with our general and genuine belief that we do gain a certain knowledge of the world through literary texts. To account for this general belief, Huemer suggests turning to another, more comprehensive, conception of language and learning.

Following the second Wittgenstein’s conception of language, according to which we do not learn language by associating words with their referential objects, but rather by understanding the meanings of these words through their use in the current language game,

Huemer asserts that we learn *how to speak* by learning the rules of this language game. These rules of usage authorize or forbid certain moves. They indicate what possible answers can be made to certain questions and determine the meanings of words, questions, and expressions by inference to other words or propositions to which they are connected. However, because words are not empty shells and refer to people, situations, contexts, and possible actions, the *language game* is also a *social game* by which we learn what to say, how to react, and what action should be appropriate in different circumstances. Consequently, Wittgenstein's theory of language enables us to affirm that literary texts "portray and display social practices" (Huemer 237) and thus enhance our linguistic abilities, while also revealing important aspects of reality.

To support this claim, Huemer reminds us that literary texts often portray characters who engage in social practices with others. Although fictional, these characters are specific persons who talk and act in response to certain situations that could happen in the real world. It is reasonable to believe that readers can learn from characters' responses to various situations. Through their reading, readers are brought to reflect on how they might behave if they were placed in the same situation or made to question their own previous assumptions about what one should do in such a situation. Therefore, one can assert that literature "can enrich our actual abilities to engage in social practice and make us reflect upon the practices we already take part in" (Huemer 237). For Huemer, a work of fiction can instruct human beings about appropriate social practices and behaviors in many ways. A reader can adopt a critical stance toward a character's reaction to a particular situation, and avoid doing the same in his own life, but he can also strive to imitate his or her example in his own social practices. For instance, we may be critical of the way in which the heroine

of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennett, feels so sure of her opinion regarding Darcy's character, but we might be inclined to imitate her ability to admit to her errors and to change her opinion when proven wrong.

Nonetheless, one of the most complex elements of our social practices remains, for Huemer, language itself. Reading literature enriches our competence in language by the acquisition of a more complex and precise vocabulary, by the development of our ability to follow long sentences with complex syntactical structures, and by the improvement of our understanding through the exposure to metaphors. If we understand the world through language, then the improvement of our linguistic abilities must induce a better understanding of the world. That is precisely the claim Huemer wants to make. For him, being more competent in language means knowing more about the world because "there is an intimate relation between language and the world" (239). This means that "a better understanding of the workings of language" (239) gives us "a richer picture of the world" (239). For instance, in Dickens' novel *Our Mutual Friend*, Mr. Wilfer compares his relationship with his wife to his relationship with a specific tune, *The Death March of Saul*. This surprising comparison has the power to reveal something that we would not have been able to understand without this poetic device: each person has a style, a rhythm, and a certain tonality of her own, and our relationship to this person is modulated by our ability to harmonize our own style and rhythm to hers.¹³³ This metaphor may influence our perception of social relations and the way we act towards other people. It seems, therefore, that social and linguistic abilities, acquired through our readings of literary texts, do have a cognitive relevance, although the knowledge we gain from them is non-propositional.

¹³³ See Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 309.

According to Huemer, literary texts do not communicate “new information about the world” (Huemer 243) but rather put us in a position from which we can draw “inferences we could or would not have drawn otherwise” (243).

2.4 Intersubjectivity and the Complementary Relationship Between Philosophy and Literature

The position I want to defend about literary cognitivism relies on some major points advanced by Putnam, Elgin, and Huemer. For instance, Putnam and Elgin both stress how necessary the work of the imagination is for the constitution of knowledge. Following them, I underline the importance that the imagination and the emotions play in our learning process, especially in the indispensable workings of exemplification. I will also follow Huemer and Elgin in their insistence on the necessity to widen our conception of knowledge and learning in order to include the existence of non-propositional truths and the relevance of literary experiments. As Putnam emphasizes, philosophers have underestimated the tremendous importance of the imagination in the acquisition of knowledge. To remedy this oversight, I intend to disclose the active participation of the imagination in the *acquisition* of knowledge as well as its important contribution for the *completion* of our understanding in matters concerning human life. In other words, my claim is that in order to complete and achieve the theoretical knowledge acquired through philosophical theories, we need to reflect on the exemplifications and the various hypotheses provided by literary works. Therefore, I am advocating for a complementary – as opposed to an agonistic – relationship between literature and philosophy.

As we have seen, literary works do not evoke things that *are*, but things that *might be*. Through hypothesis, they display perspectives that enable readers to envisage what it would be like to be that sort of person, living in that particular time and place, having to

deal with such circumstances, and having that particular perspective. Through the medium of novels and plays, the reader can see what things look like for other people at other times. Consequently, he or she becomes able to appreciate the moral problems that these characters face and to reflect on the accurateness of their responses to diverse situations. Not only do literary works improve the readers' experience and wisdom regarding the problems of human life, but they also allow them to attain what I will call an intersubjective point of view. Objectivity, the ideal pursued by science and philosophy, is supposed to result from the neutralization of a subjective stance and bias. Such an ideal cannot be attained through works of fiction. In literary works, the multiple points of view expressed by narrator, author or character are irreducible to a unique perspective and remain plural. However, what the readers may gain from being acquainted with these subjective points of view is the relative enlargement of their own perspective through the inclusion and discussion of the perspectives of others. Through this experience, readers can reach an intersubjective point of view.

In order to develop this understanding of the intersubjective dimension of literature, I would like to draw on the concept of *sensus communis* that Kant introduces in the *Critique of Judgment*.¹³⁴ In a work concerned in large part with aesthetical judgments, Kant brings forth the notion of *sensus communis* to account for the *universality* implied in judgments of taste. For him, even though our judgments of taste remain merely subjective, we consider the pleasure derived from them as being universal and necessary.¹³⁵ According

¹³⁴ See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 101-103 (Ak V, 293-296)

¹³⁵ In the *Deduction of Pure Aesthetical Judgment*, Kant formulates what is for him the problem of judgments of taste. These judgments, although subjective, contain a claim to "universality and necessity" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 96), (Ak V, 286-287). For him, the question is therefore the following: "How is a judgment possible, in which merely from *our own* feeling of pleasure in an object, independently of its concept, we judge that this pleasure attaches to the representation of the same object exists *in every other subject*?" (97-98), (Ak V, 288).

to Kant, the foundation of this “*subjective universality*” lies in the existence of common human cognitive faculties: the imagination and the understanding. More precisely, he states that in matters of aesthetical judgments, where the understanding has no predetermined rule to provide, we must assume that the imagination and the understanding arrive somewhat freely at a sort of agreement. Moreover, we assume, according to Kant, that everybody placed before the same beautiful form would experience the same pleasing agreement of his/her faculties. Consequently, the notion of *sensus communis* derives from the assumption that humans share common faculties which operate according to similar rules. More precisely, Kant would say that when we reflect on a beautiful form, our imagination and our understanding take into account the modes of thinking of others and their possible perspectives as humans. Therefore, *sensus communis* can be defined as the “faculty of judgment, which in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of all other men in thought” (*Critique of Judgment* 101). The purpose of this mode of representation is to avoid the illusions “arising from the private conditions” (101-102) by comparing our “judgment with the collective Reason of humanity” (102). In short, *sensus communis* describes a common basic human ability to compare our judgment with the possible judgments of others and to put ourselves in their place, thus avoiding “the contingency attach[ed] to our own judgment” (102).

Drawing from the Kantian notion of *sensus communis*, we can formulate the hypothesis that literature contributes to cultivate and develop our capacity to form intersubjective and universal judgments. In becoming acquainted with other people’s perspectives, opinions, and actions in novels, the reader is able to compare them to his or her own perspective, and to form a universally valid judgment about problems of human

life that is not the mere expression of his or her own singular position. To follow Charles Dickens' formidable expression, humans can therefore avoid the evils of *podsnappery*, and the moral and epistemic faults it entails. For Dickens, "podsnappery" illustrates the narrow-minded, narcissistic, and conceited self-satisfaction of Mr. Podsnap, a self-righteous character who has the tendency to deny the existence of anything that does not fit into his own very limited perspective of the world.¹³⁶ If philosophy aims at giving us an objective knowledge about human life, literature provides us with the capacity to attain an *intersubjective point of view* on the same subject, which completes and exemplifies concretely what abstract objectivity formally indicates.

While Kant seems to restrict the use of *sensus communis* to judgment of taste, we might extend his discussion to ethical and political judgments as well. The multiple perspectives offered to us in literary works are not only about what is beautiful or ugly, but also about what is right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust. As Aristotle keenly remarked, what is common to aesthetics, ethics, and politics is that their object of study – the beautiful, the good, or the just – changes and varies according to time, place and people. For this reason, they are often a source of polemic and debate, unlike the propositions of mathematics or logic. Consequently, in these fields of knowledge, objectivity and necessity can never be *completely achieved*. As Aristotle contends in the first chapter of *Nicomachean Ethics*, aesthetical, ethical, and political concepts do not exist by *nature* but by *convention*.¹³⁷ Consequently, they undergo multiple changes and variations, depending on time and place. Therefore, a wise human being would not demand in these fields of

¹³⁶ See Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 124-125.

¹³⁷ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4 (1,2,1095a).

knowledge the same degree of precision and necessity that prevails, for instance, in mathematical demonstrations.¹³⁸

If I agree with Aristotle that a logical demonstration in ethics, aesthetics, and politics is never to be totally attained and should not even be sought out, and that a certain modesty is required regarding the universality and necessity of the principles propounded in these fields, the help of literary works should then appear to be necessary in order to refine and develop our understanding of these notions. The multiple perspectives and possibilities literary works display to their readers may therefore contribute to enlarge their understanding of these questions, while providing them with the concrete grounds on which they can grasp the complexity of their meaning. In this respect, poetic art is akin to rhetoric, the art of persuasion, which the Greeks and the Romans used in order to discuss and deliberate on matters of ethical and political concern. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that rhetoric is concerned with subjects that are controversial and that generate debate, whereas science — and in his opinion this term comprehends philosophy as well — aims at the demonstration of one universal truth.¹³⁹ He also states that certain subjects are particularly controversial, notably those found in the fields of ethics and politics.¹⁴⁰ It is precisely in the study of these kind of subjects that rhetoric should be useful. It follows that rhetoric, being the art of persuasion through language, would appear as very odd and misplaced in arithmetic, metaphysics, or physics, while remaining essential to domains where there are and ever will be pluralistic views. Moreover, in these domains, logical and complex demonstrations will never convince or persuade anyone.¹⁴¹ According to Aristotle, when a

¹³⁸ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4 (1,2,1095a).

¹³⁹ See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 6 (1, 2, 1357b).

¹⁴⁰ See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book II, 9 (1, 2, 1356a).

¹⁴¹ See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 10 (1, 2, 1357a).

philosopher pursues a scientific investigation about ethics and follows the rules of logical demonstration to prove his or her thesis, he or she must be aware that few people will be able to read and understand it properly. Unfortunately, most people would not be able to follow the demonstrative process and would thus remain unconvinced. This is why rhetorical persuasion is important. However, according to Aristotle, persuasion is not the only goal of rhetoric. Rhetoric also serves as a technique, enabling us to envisage, in a controversy, what possible answers can arise. In doing so, it renders us aware of the contrary sides of the debate and provides us with a broader view of the problem.¹⁴² Rhetoric seems therefore to accomplish what *sensus communis* did for Kant, that is, to achieve an intersubjective point of view.

What we may conclude from Aristotle's position regarding science, philosophy, and rhetoric is that literature, like rhetoric, is concerned with concepts that are controversial and problematic, and that it can therefore provide what theoretical works of philosophy often cannot: the means to present concretely to a large audience of non-specialists certain philosophical difficulties. Presenting to their readers multiple contradictory perspectives about a subject, literary works also help them to form their own opinions on these matters. Literature and rhetoric thus become the locus of *sensus communis* and serve as a useful tool for scientific or philosophical explanations, because the scientific and philosophical ideas would remain incompletely understood and unable to produce subjective conviction without the enlarging of own's perspective and its confrontation with that of others, provided by literary texts.

¹⁴² See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I, 6-7 (1,1, 1355b).

Of course, literature is not synonymous with rhetoric. The differences between them remain important. First, literature is not an argumentative discourse that uses style, tone, gesture, and probable arguments to *persuade* an audience of the validity or the advantage of an opinion concerning matters of the world. Literature, as we have seen with Elgin, is not about facts, or things that are, but about possibilities. It is fiction. However, it does possess a cognitive value. Instead of *persuading* readers of the advantage of one opinion, it presents them with hypothetical perspectives and situations that help them to reflect critically and challenge their own conceptions of human life. Literary works are less about persuasion than about critical thinking. They provide a training of the imagination, by which one can understand better what one already confusedly knows about human life. They help humans to improve their former knowledge by confronting it in the face of other people's differing perspectives. This latter dimension is of tremendous consequence when one considers the relationship between literature and philosophy, as I will now explain.

According to John Gibson, the knowledge that we gain from philosophy remains incomplete if it is not *acknowledged*.¹⁴³ The distinction used by Gibson between knowing and acknowledging is borrowed from Stanley Cavell's early work *Must We Mean What We Say*. According to that distinction, to know something means that we have acquired a certain understanding of what a given object is through experience, reflection, or theoretical demonstration, while to acknowledge something means that we respond adequately to the claims that this knowledge makes upon us in real life. For instance, according to Cavell, one does not really *know* what another person feels or thinks if one

¹⁴³ Gibson, "Between Truth and Triviality," 224-237.

does not *acknowledge* the other person's claim that a certain action should be taken in relation to it. In other words, we do not understand fully another person's pain unless we acknowledge it by manifestations of sympathy through our speech and action. As Cavell remarks, "It is not enough that I *know* (am certain) that you suffer, I must do or reveal something (whatever can be done). In a word, I *must* acknowledge it, otherwise *I do not know* what (yours, his) 'being in pain' is" (*Must We Mean* 263). For John Gibson, the distinction Cavell makes between knowing and acknowledging reveals the existence of a sphere of understanding that is generally unheeded in our usual conception of knowledge. Moreover, it suggests that our knowledge remains empty or hollow if it cannot produce an appropriate response or an acknowledgment of what is before us. We can easily envisage various situations where a person correctly identifies what is going on or what another person is experiencing without being able to respond to it. For instance, knowing that a person is in pain does not only consist in a correct identification of the phenomena; it also implies the recognition of the claim it makes on us to act according to a certain set of responses. These expected responses are part of the form of life that we share with the other members of our community. Therefore, according to Gibson, we must complete our knowledge of something by acknowledging its existence.

Gibson also points out that without acknowledgment, we would remain estranged from the world and others, because it is "through our successes and failures of acknowledgment" that "we announce our participation in (or our estrangement from) a shared form of life" (233). If knowledge in general is a way to establish a relationship between humans and the world, it would remain abstract and purely formal without our acknowledgement of it. The world would remain alien to us, and other humans would

remain forever distant and indecipherable, if we did not respond to their claims and attest by our recognition of their pain or their fear, that they exist for us, that we share the same emotions, and that we are engaged in the same world. Therefore, according to Gibson's interpretation of Cavell, the difference between acknowledgment and knowledge can be formulated as the difference "between a completeness and incompleteness of understanding" (234).

Gibson's appropriation of Cavell's conceptuality allows him to affirm that literature provides us with acknowledgement and that it can therefore contribute significantly to the completion of our knowledge, while also fostering our relationship with the world and other humans. Consequently, to prove the cognitive value of literature, we need not affirm, for Gibson, that literature is truth-oriented and that it delivers the same kind of knowledge about the world that philosophy or science delivers. On the contrary, it would be more appropriate to say that it gives us the means to acknowledge what we already but insufficiently know. The acknowledgment of other people, of their emotions, and of the tragic dimension of their choices is obtained through the concreteness of narrative, the unique story of human activity, and from characters of flesh and blood (although fictional) to whom we react and respond. Referring to Shakespeare's play, *Othello*, Gibson explains that if we do not get our understanding of the word "jealousy" from the play, we nevertheless *complete* our understanding of it through our acknowledgment of Othello, the character. In him, says Gibson, "we see the word made flesh" (236). Our knowledge of jealousy cannot be complete unless we acknowledge it in the concreteness of a character that stands before us. The play asks its readers or its audience to bring their knowledge of human life into their reading or watching activity, to complete it by the acknowledgment

of its embodiment in one singular story lived by fictional, but concrete characters. According to John Gibson, art and literature can therefore overcome the distance between humans and the world that knowledge itself is unable to bridge, because they have the ability to “present our world to us not as a mere conceptual object but as a living world” (Gibson 236).

Gibson’s position demonstrates that without the concreteness of narrative and of definite characters entangled in specific situations, humans cannot fully understand their lives and their world. It suggests, moreover, that philosophical knowledge, which is abstract, objective, and theoretical, needs the concrete workings of the imagination to generate a full understanding of its concepts and to enable an individual to respond to his world and act in it with reflection and wisdom. To be fully understood and to become real principles of action, the universal propositions of philosophy have to descend from their objective intelligible superior world into the concrete, particular, and passionate world of human life.

One can also advocate for the complementary relationships between philosophy and literature by turning to philosophers who do not explicitly make that specific claim. For instance, even a very rationalist and formal philosopher such as Kant admits to the importance of *concrete examples* in morals, and to the necessity of training human emotions and judgment when it comes to form a virtuous character. In other words, Kant recognizes that moral theory is incomplete and cannot create a virtuous human subject without an appeal to its emotions and the development of its capacity to judge what to do in particular concrete situations. In the introduction of the *Groundworks of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant clearly distinguishes between the foundation of morality,

which shall remain abstract, universal, and a priori, and its application to human subjects, who, however rational, are also empirical and sensible subjects who need to hear a language that speaks to their subjective, emotive, and sensible character. Much as physics possesses a theoretical part concerned with pure a priori principles and an empirical part concerned with particular laws of nature, ethics for Kant must also have empirical and theoretical parts. He calls the empirical part *practical anthropology*.¹⁴⁴ This branch of moral knowledge refers to empirical subjects who have emotions and desires and who live in particular situations. For Kant, practical anthropology has nothing to do with the foundation of morals. However, the anthropological part of ethics is necessary when it comes to the implementation of these abstract moral principles in particular human subjects and thus their acquisition of a virtuous character. In the second part of *The Metaphysics of Ethics*, Kant uses the term *Methodology*¹⁴⁵ to allude to the empirical part of ethics, which relates to the *education* of the virtuous subject. If the principle of morals is not to be derived from empirical considerations concerning human nature, the *strength* that is required to make the *motives* of morality *effective* and to have it prevail over sensual inclinations is developed by education, the subject's exposure to particular and concrete situations or various examples.

Kant does not include among moral pedagogical means the reading of fiction. However, one can argue that this inclusion would have been consistent with his theory. For him, ethical methodology must indeed face two major difficulties: to know how “a maxim is to be applied in particular cases” (*Metaphysics of Ethics* 180); and to know “how to put in practice and cultivate the capacity for as well as the will to virtue” (180). Seeking to

¹⁴⁴See Kant, *Groundworks of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 2 (Ak IV, 388).

¹⁴⁵ See Kant, *The Metaphysics of Ethics*, 179-180 (Ak VI,477).

resolve these problems, Kant therefore admits that the moral law and its formulas remain insufficient when it comes to practical decision and action, because the individual has still to assess concrete and particular situations in which he or she is placed, and in which he or she feels various emotions, along with fellow human beings. In order to judge correctly of situations and to deliberate on how to apply the moral law, literary works are of tremendous help, because, as demonstrated above, they enable individuals to form their own moral judgments through the exercise of imagination and emotion.

What is true in ethics must be true in other epistemic fields concerning human life. Therefore, I would like to argue that a complete and effective understanding of moral, anthropological, psychological, or political concepts remains incomplete without an empirical confirmation of these principles through *concrete exemplifications*. What I want to suggest, here, is that a full comprehension of human life is impossible to attain through mere universal, abstract propositions; it must also be completed through literary exemplifications in which the imagination becomes able to place itself in all possible concrete situations and is exposed to various probable characters and their various opinions. Through the workings of his or her imagination, the reader, when *emotionally involved* with the characters, comes to understand why they act in certain ways and to reflect on the justness and morality of their choices. Therefore, philosophy is not opposed to literature, but assuredly needs it to fulfill its task and to ensure that what a particular theory states about human life becomes, as Putnam argues, *practical knowledge*, that is, a form of knowledge embodied in the concreteness of human life, in accordance with its complexity and diversity. *In fine*, literary works enable human subjects to respond to the world adequately, however variable situations and people may be.

2.5 Women Novelists' Engagement with the Principle Philosophical Ideas of the Enlightenment

What I have established concerning the cognitive value of literature may seem to have driven me far from the previous chapter, which was centered around eighteenth-century British women novelists. This is not the case, though, since the claim that I make in chapter one, that these women novelists use the novel to engage with the philosophical debates of their time, must be supported by the demonstration of the cognitive dimension of novels. The definition I give of the novel in my first chapter is, in fact, a necessary step toward an examination of the power of the novel to disclose truth or knowledge. Not surprisingly, the reasons put forward in the above sections of this chapter to defend the cognitive dimension of novels are closely linked to the specific nature of novels, as defined in chapter one. The novel is described, in chapter one, drawing on the work of Ian Watt, as a genre that seeks to imitate real life and aims at verisimilitude, although there can be, of course, in some novels, fantastic elements. This quality can be understood as an important feature enabling them to suggest possibilities of human life that can be grasped by readers as probable and convincing, and which can thus enlarge their understanding of the world. This capacity is described as an important aspect of the novel's cognitive dimension in the current chapter, notably through a reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*, according to which the pleasure taken from a poetical work is grounded on the pleasure to learn and this pleasure itself on its probability. The realism of novels is also what enables them to provide exemplifications and literary experiments, an important cognitive dimension of novels, because although they are a creation of the imagination, they possess the appearance of reality. However, a literary work of art is not only of cognitive value through its representative power or mimesis; it is also a source of puzzlements, questions

and reassessments of one's positions. As stated in chapter one, one major characteristic of novels is irony. This feature is the means through which novels can create multiple forms of distancing, which, as explained in previous sections of this chapter, enable readers to question their assumptions and those of others, and to progress in their understanding of humans and the world. The fact that novels, as suggested in chapter one, create a close relationship with their readers, who identify with characters and sympathize with their pain and misery, is precisely what makes them able to produce another form of knowledge, that I would call cathartic, because it is accessible mainly through emotions. I suggest in the previous chapter that novels were centered around the characters' feelings and thoughts, and that eighteenth-century British women were particularly interested, due in part to their more domestic life, to these subjects. I also suggest that they seemed to doubt the ability of rationalistic demonstrations to express properly, in all their complexity, the inner complexity of the human mind. This consideration has been enlarged in this chapter, which shows how novels are able to disclose non-propositional truths and to use language in a way that is more creative than in philosophical works. We may infer that literary language and its specific relationship with truth might have appeared particularly appealing for a gender that felt not entirely at home within the rationalistic description of the world. In chapter one, I state that, instead of opposing the sort of knowledge that novels can impart with the discursive and abstract knowledge of philosophical demonstration, British women novelists really saw themselves as offering a necessary complement to a discourse that would remain, otherwise, incomplete. In doing so, these women illustrate what I have been defending thus far in this chapter, that is, that philosophy and literature should not be seen

as opposing factions, but as collaborative forces, which, together, build a more complete understanding of the world.

I would like now to investigate in a more specific manner how women, through the means of the novel, engaged with the main philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment. In other words, I will try to present more concretely, how they use the novel to discuss, problematize, and exemplify the principal philosophical problems of their time. To understand the central issues that were discussed in this period in philosophical essays and in novels, I will present a synthesis of the major intellectual changes brought about by the philosophical revolution of the Enlightenment. Since Enlightenment philosophy encompasses a large spectrum of ideas, I concentrate on the ideas and concepts related to the understanding of human life. The following paragraphs thus give special attention to the conception of the *modern self*, its identity and stability, as well as its relationship to the body, society, and nature. My focus on the self and on problems of identity is related to a comprehension of literature as being principally concerned about human life and the fundamental question: *how to live?*¹⁴⁶ Responses to this question entail an investigation about what a human subject is and how he or she is related to others and the world. As already explained in the introduction, Modern and Enlightenment philosophers revolutionized the previous and traditional comprehensions of the self and its relation to

¹⁴⁶ Hilary Putnam identifies this question as *the* central moral question and sees it as one that philosophy alone cannot answer. For him, the literary imagination enables the readers to envisage different possibilities and moral perplexities that can enlarge their experience and knowledge of human life. See Putnam, "Literature, Science and Reflection," 453-491. Martha Nussbaum, for her part, reminds us that the old quarrel between philosophy and literature that started in Plato's time was based on competing claims, both poetry and philosophy pretending to provide an answer to the question: how should one live? Instead of contesting literature's competence to answer that difficult question, as Plato did, Martha Nussbaum argues that for the resolution of this problem, "literary texts are indispensable to a philosophical inquiry" (Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 23).

the world¹⁴⁷. One must recall that the self, by a sort of turn over, became in early modern philosophy a “subject,” leaving the entire outside world to stand as an “object” of its representations. Therefore, for many philosophers, an enquiry into the subject’s representations appeared mandatory if one seeks to find an answer to the origin and limits of human knowledge. The difficulties which arose from the engulfment of reality into the self and of the self’s subsequent separation from everything else, conceived as a mere object of thought, remained the main difficulty that the novelists I consider in this dissertation tried to explore. In this revolutionary context, the novel, as a new genre, helped to articulate and answer these questions in a more concrete and complex way, presenting to its readers the “moral perplexities” stemming from the separated and isolated subject, through the means of hypothetic, and probable situations, about which different and opposite points of view can be heard.¹⁴⁸ Women novelists, for their part, explored how this subjective turn and the inward posture embodied by the modern self, might appear from a female perspective, that is, from the point of view of individuals who felt compelled but also estranged from the promise of emancipation attached to the autonomous subject. Having described the Enlightenment, in the introduction, as an age of doubt,¹⁴⁹ I claim that women novelists were particularly well positioned to notice the failures of autonomy, the difficulties of self-knowledge and the dreadful discontinuity of self-identity in the early modern age and thus to articulate the doubts that many philosophers have formulated without arriving, perhaps, at this level of clarity and concreteness.

¹⁴⁷ See introduction, p.26-29.

¹⁴⁸ Hilary Putnam uses the expression “moral perplexities” to refer to what literature helps to formulate and represent to its readers through its imaginative dimension. See Putnam, “Literature, Science and Reflection,” 486.

¹⁴⁹ See introduction, 25.

We generally refer to the eighteenth century as the age of Enlightenment. In the introduction, I engage with what I deem to be an unjust characterization of the Enlightenment as to its general meaning and as to its legacy towards Western culture. I have reaffirmed the philosophical importance of this era, which has questioned traditional and dogmatic assumptions in the name of reason, and which have promoted the human subject as the fundamental value of ethics and politics. I have, in short, advocated for the humanist impulse of the era against those who tend to caricature it through the lens of colonialism and capitalism, reducing the conceptual richness of this philosophical period to economic and political features that were not necessarily endorsed nor promoted by the philosophers themselves, when they were not already criticizing it. Against the general conception of Enlightenment as characterized mostly by a form of rationalistic arrogance, I have revealed how uncertain and doubtful the philosophers were concerning the possibility for human reason to ever pierce the mysteries of nature and of the human mind and how therefore prudent and modest they remained regarding what humans can really know.¹⁵⁰

My concern in this chapter is not to discuss the moral value of the Enlightenment, but to present a short summary of its principal philosophical features, ideas, and topics. The term Enlightenment itself indicates a general human movement towards knowledge, happiness, and freedom, guided by reason.¹⁵¹ It is also, according to d'Alembert, “the century of philosophy par excellence” (qtd in Cassirer 1). Assimilating all rational knowledge to philosophy, d'Alembert means that his age is characterized by tremendous

¹⁵⁰ See introduction, 29-31.

¹⁵¹ Cassirer asserts that all thinkers in the eighteenth century were conscious of being lifted by an irrepressible movement toward intellectual progress to which they wanted to contribute. See Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 4-5.

progress in the natural sciences, mathematics, morals, politics, and aesthetics. However, as Cassirer has remarked, this uncommon progress in philosophical knowledge does not only result in mere quantitative gain; it also implies qualitative deepening.¹⁵² Enlightenment philosophy does not strive merely to accumulate knowledge about the world; it is also interested in investigating the origin of that knowledge, the human mind, its components, or faculties, in order to specify the extent and limit of the knowledge it produces. This inquiry into the origin of our knowledge becomes, for philosophers such as Locke, an inquiry into the human mind.¹⁵³ The problem was, for him, to retrace the origin of our ideas from the primary data furnished by our sensations. For empiricists such as Locke, all ideas or knowledge that did not emerge from an original sensation or that resulted from arbitrary associations were considered doubtful. Enlightenment philosophy is therefore characterized by a certain skepticism and by the will to examine closely all putative knowledge in order to determine if it is not, after all, a groundless belief or a mere illusion.¹⁵⁴ To display their criticism, these philosophers turned to the scientific method as the new model of thought. Consequently, they privileged analysis and experimentation, over speculative demonstration, based on a priori principles.¹⁵⁵ However, this new philosophical attitude, apparently *bended* toward experience, questioned the testimony of

¹⁵² See Cassirer 5.

¹⁵³ In the introduction of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke declares that the investigation of our own minds is the basis of any further knowledge of any exterior object and that this study has to be undertaken for our general pleasure and advantage: “whatever be the difficulties, that lie in the way of this inquiry; whatever it be, that keeps us so much in the dark to ourselves; sure I am, that all the light we can let in upon our own minds; all the acquaintance we can make with our own understandings, will not only be very pleasant; but bring us great advantage, in directing our thoughts in the search of other things” (Locke 4).

¹⁵⁴ According to Karen Bloom Gevirtz, the philosophical revolution was characterized by a “crisis of ‘knowability’,” which entailed a suspicion towards the human body, the mind and the methods of knowledge, which were seen as potential sources of errors. See Gevirtz, *Woman, the Novel and Natural Philosophy. 1660-1727*, 15.

¹⁵⁵ For more about the influence of the scientific method on philosophy, see Cassirer 7-12.

the senses and privileged the mathematical construction of an ideal nature over the one encountered in our ordinary perception.¹⁵⁶ Even if he was not empirical in his method, Descartes incited this skeptical tendency with his notion of methodical doubt,¹⁵⁷ and was followed by Locke, who rejected even what rationalists like Descartes had thought absolutely certain: innate ideas.¹⁵⁸ Later on, David Hume took skepticism further when he concluded that all knowledge about matters of fact is nothing but mere belief based on feeling and habit.¹⁵⁹

One important consequence of this radical criticism of common knowledge is the liberation it gives to the subject, who realizes the power of his own reason to examine, criticize, and reject the authority of false knowledge. This intellectual freedom or autonomy became for Kant the symbol of the Enlightenment and he chose the latin formula, “*Sapere Aude!*” (*What is Enlightenment* 17), to define its *motto*. For Kant and many other philosophers, the Enlightenment was the age in which human beings dared to *think by themselves*. Therefore, they could emancipate themselves from their tutors and their “self-incurred immaturity” (Kant, *What is Enlightenment* 17). However, this “disengaged self,” as Charles Taylor puts it,¹⁶⁰ who achieves autonomy through his critical stance towards

¹⁵⁶ See Cassirer 11. One can also find in Edmund Husserl’s *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* an acute representation of modern science. According to him, modern science has constructed a mathematical nature, and this nature has replaced our more intuitive relation to the world, which he refers to as *Lebenswelt*. See Husserl, *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*.

¹⁵⁷ Descartes’s skeptical project is announced at the beginning of the first *Meditation*: “Il y a déjà quelque temps que je me suis aperçu que, dès mes premières années, j’avais reçu quantité de fausses opinions pour véritables, et que ce que j’ai depuis fondé sur des principes si mal assurés, ne pouvait être que fort douteux et incertain; de façon qu’il me fallait entreprendre sérieusement une fois dans ma vie de me défaire de toutes les opinions que j’avais reçues jusqu’alors en ma créance, et commencer tout de nouveau depuis les fondements (...)” (Descartes, *Méditations métaphysiques* 65).

¹⁵⁸ See Locke, 8-32.

¹⁵⁹ Hume reveals that what we think are causal relations between objects are in fact nothing more than a *feeling* in the mind of their connection, induced by the *habit* we have of seeing the two objects conjoined in our experience. See Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 50.

¹⁶⁰ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 143-158.

himself and the world, *reifies* and objectifies nature and himself in the same process. Consequently, the eighteenth-century general claim for autonomy and freedom had a counterpart in the growing reification of humans and nature, as well as in their separation from their bodies and from the world. The claim for autonomy and the value put on free-determination and free-thinking were therefore counter-balanced by a tendency to reify and determine as “objects” both humans and nature. The Enlightenment was somehow built on this irreconcilable tension between freedom and determinism. Disengaged and neutral, the philosophical attitude of the Enlightenment philosopher was really that of a “spectator,” as Addison termed it, contemplating and reflecting on the world, from an external and critical point of view.¹⁶¹

The ancient worldview of an orderly, meaningful, and substantial whole in which humans lived was replaced in the modern era, a period that stretched from the late seventeenth century into the early nineteenth century, by a sharp dualism of body and mind, and of humans and nature.¹⁶² The powerful autonomous subject, who objectifies nature and himself, faces therefore the dangers of solipsism, and the necessity to recover his own body and to relate in some way to the world. The reality of the world and of others, and the necessity to ascertain one’s existence was, notwithstanding Dr. Johnson’s famous

¹⁶¹ See Addison, *The Spectator*, 3. *The Spectator* was a daily publication that started in 1711 by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. It ended in 1712 and was resumed for a short time in 1714 by Addison and two other collaborators, Eustace Budgell and John Hughes. Widely read by a large and diversified public, notably by women, this publication had a didactic objective. Addison and Steele wanted to make their readers reflect about human life in a fashion that would combine morality and wit. Their chief objective was to elevate their readers morally and to disseminate the values of the Enlightenment, bringing philosophy “out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges” and make it “dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables, and in coffee-houses” (Addison 38).

¹⁶² In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor gives an acute description of the shift induced by modern thought in our representation of the world and of the position we hold in it as human beings. He notes, “the notion of ourselves as disengaged subjects”, breaks free “from a comfortable but illusory sense of immersion in nature” and makes us “objectif [y] the world around us” (Taylor 12).

dismissal of it, a real philosophical problem. Boswell reports that Johnson thought he could refute Berkeley's position that matter was nonexistent and that everything in the universe is merely ideal by striking his foot with force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it.¹⁶³ The insistence on the reality of the individual mind, as a source of all knowledge, and as the only thing whose existence can be proven, remained central, despite diverse attempts at refutation. Novels approached this problem in their own way by representing protagonists who felt estranged from the world and society. These characters seemed to wonder what their place might be in this new world and how they were supposed to act or to interpret other people's intentions.¹⁶⁴

The new autonomous subject also appeared in the eyes of some eighteenth-century thinkers to lead dangerously to a rejection of moral traditions and of societal conventions.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the objective stance through which the mind was described in all its separate parts was suspected to lead to a mechanistic and purely rational conception of morality based on self-interest and the avoidance of pain.¹⁶⁶ Following Hobbes, Locke makes pleasure and pain the source of good and evil. More precisely, the feeling of uneasiness appears for him as the fundament of the will; it is what prompts humans to act. Uneasiness is described by Locke as "the absence of anything, whose present enjoyment carries the *idea* of delight with it" (90-9). Therefore, it is to avoid uneasiness that most humans act. Their action is thus determined by the avoidance of pain and the search for

¹⁶³ See Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 1, 471: 6 August 1763.

¹⁶⁴ This feeling of alienation from the world and the difficulty to know other people and read their intentions are at the core of the Burney's first three novels: *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla*. The main protagonists of these novels struggle to find their place in a hostile and incomprehensible world and to preserve, as well as reveal their true selves.

¹⁶⁵ Karen Bloom Gewirtz observes that the autonomy of the rational subject, his/her detachment from the world and society, was perceived as something threatening to moral conventions and social order. See Gewirtz, *Women, the Novel, and Natural Philosophy*, 23-29.

pleasure. Some philosophers suggested that a calculation based on our best interests and the maximization of pleasure is not entirely moral, even though it is in accordance with God's will.¹⁶⁷ The problems evoked are at the origin of an alternate trend of thought in eighteenth-century philosophy, which claimed that humans could perceive the Good through a special moral sense and that human feelings of benevolence and sympathy were at the core of our moral responses.

One can find the source of this opposite tendency in the writings of Lord Shaftesbury, as well as in the works of some of his successors, like Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith.¹⁶⁸ Shaftesbury and Hutcheson believed that humans possess a moral sentiment, a faculty by which they can perceive immediately a good or a bad action through the pleasure or the pain they feel in relation to it. This moral compass is situated within humans and not outside them; it is not selfish and does not tend toward self-preservation, but it is essentially altruistic. Therefore, for them, pleasure and pain do not relate to self-preservation and personal interest—as is the case for Locke—but are directed towards others. For instance, Hutcheson believed that the source of all moral actions lies in humans' natural affection towards others,¹⁶⁹ and he consequently denied the validity of the opposite position, held by Mandeville, for whom all supposedly benevolent actions are rooted on selfish motivations.¹⁷⁰ Both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson made *benevolence* the cardinal

¹⁶⁷ James Sambrook noted that many Enlightenment philosophers criticized the moral theories of Locke, Hobbes, and Mandeville, because they believed that the moral distinctions between good and bad should not be reduced to mere feelings of pleasure and pain. They also questioned the importance given to self-interest and desire. Charles Taylor, for his part, mentions also that the "exteriority" of the good perceived as an object of desire or as God's law was also subject to much criticism. See Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century. The Intellectual Context of English Literature, 1700-1789*, 50 and 56; and Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 248-249.

¹⁶⁸ See Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with illustrations on the Moral Sense*; Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, Etc.* 2 vol.

¹⁶⁹ See Hutcheson 13-14.

¹⁷⁰ See Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*.

virtue of humanity and affirmed that real sentiments of benevolence exist in human nature and constitute the foundation of society. For his part, David Hume saw the altruistic sentiment of sympathy as the source of all good actions and decidedly rejected self-interest as the basis of our moral actions.¹⁷¹ For him, sympathy is a natural capacity to feel someone else's pain or joy indirectly, by imagining what we would have felt if we were in his or her place. Later, Jean-Jacques Rousseau embraced this perspective when he located the source of morality in the human heart, or "conscience."¹⁷² He claimed that conscience is *the voice of nature within us*, and that it should guide all our actions. According to Rousseau, Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, society and culture can corrupt or even choke one's natural feelings of sympathy toward others, but this loss is not irretrievable. For instance, Rousseau believed that humans could recover their inner natural goodness through introspection. This introspection might allow humans to recover or rediscover their genuine inner nature, which is good. This moral conception assumes that all that is natural is good.¹⁷³ On the contrary, reason and culture are morally ambiguous for Rousseau and can efface our natural goodness. In his *Second Discourse*, he shows how the development of reason, science and technology have contributed to the control of nature, the subjugation of humans, and the corruption of their hearts.¹⁷⁴ The emphasis placed on nature, viewed

¹⁷¹ Hume makes sympathy the origin of all natural virtues in humans and compares it to a vibration that communicates itself from one person to another, because all human beings are "similar in their feelings and operations" (294) and thus can be moved by the expression of pain or pleasure in others. See Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 294.

¹⁷² In *Emile*, Rousseau affirms that there is at the bottom of our soul "un principe inné de justice et de vertu, sur lequel, malgré nos propres maximes, nous jugeons nos propres actions et celles d'autrui comme bonnes ou mauvaises, et c'est à ce principe que je donne le nom de conscience" (434).

¹⁷³ At the beginning of *Emile*, Rousseau states that « "Tout est bien, sortant des mains de l'auteur des choses : tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme" (81). This statement shows that what God makes, which is natural, is good and that all human intervention into nature is potentially destructive.

¹⁷⁴ Rousseau's perception of perfectibility is rather pessimistic. According to him, "Il serait triste pour nous d'être forcés de convenir, que cette faculté distinctive, et presque illimitée, est la source de tous les malheurs de l'homme; que c'est elle qui le tire, à force de temps, de cette condition originelle dans laquelle il coulerait

as a life form which is genuine and organic, shows not only how much this alternate current of philosophy distanced itself from the mechanistic perspective of humans and nature propounded by Locke, Newton, and Descartes, but also how this philosophical trend rejected rational control and the moral value of a disengaged neutral stance.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, humans felt as if they were deprived of their essence, which was previously determined in relation to their position in an orderly cosmos regulated by God. They now had to learn to define themselves through their intellectual autonomy or by the expression of their inner nature. This new context raised problems of personal identity. For instance, Locke evoked the possibility that a person could still be herself while occupying another body, because for him the essence and the unity of the self relies on consciousness, a property of the mind. This affirmation might have seemed odd and disturbing for many, considering that most humans tend to identify themselves with their body, their face, or their physical appearance. Locke went even further when he admitted to a certain discontinuity and instability of the self in cases where consciousness stops or temporarily disappears. For him, the loss of one's consciousness and personal identity could be experienced through sleep or periods of mental breakdown or insanity. In these states, the individual was no longer himself/herself because he/she was not conscious anymore of his/her personal identity and history. Regarding identity and stability, Hume went even further than Locke. In his main philosophical opus, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he boldly affirmed that there is no such thing as a "self" or a stable personal identity that could be perceived by us as a substantial unity. For him, all that

des jours tranquilles et innocents; que c'est elle, qui faisant éclore avec les siècles ses lumières et ses erreurs, ses vices et ses vertus, le rend à la longue le tyran de lui-même, et de la Nature" (*Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* 80).

we can perceive is “a bundle or collection of different perceptions” (Hume 134), our mind being a “kind of theater” (134) where ideas and impressions appear and disappear without interruption. This ongoing circulation of impressions and perceptions cannot form the substantial and stable unity called a self. Therefore, for Hume, the self to whom we refer to when we speak and think is a mere construction of our imagination, an *imagined self*, while the metaphor of the theater seems to imply that our real experienced self is no less a fiction than the one we attribute to a character in a play or a novel.¹⁷⁵ These doubts about the unity of the self and the constancy of personal identity raised considerable moral problems. As Patricia Meyer Spacks remarks, “Moral responsibility depends on consistent identity” (Spacks 12). Therefore, if one does not possess a stable self and a continuous identity, one cannot be held responsible for his actions and cannot even be considered as a moral agent. In order to affirm the possibility of moral agency, women novelists took these radical philosophical thoughts seriously and tried to represent the dangers of identity loss, and the precarity of the self, while aiming at the same time to imagine the conditions that are necessary to maintain a stable sense of oneself.¹⁷⁶

As Karen Bloom Gevirtz astutely remarks, the new autonomous and disengaged self that the philosophical revolution introduced, and which was the subject of the new science, as well as the apostle of reason, was perceived as male.¹⁷⁷ During the eighteenth century, women were not encouraged to learn about natural sciences and philosophy and,

¹⁷⁵ See Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self. Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*, 10.

¹⁷⁶ One of the most striking examples of this can be found in Frances Burney’s *Cecilia*, when the heroine temporarily loses all clear consciousness of herself, due to a major breakdown. In her presentation of this episode, Burney seems to acknowledge the possibility of a discontinuity of the self. However, she shows at the same time, that this traumatic experience helps to shape Cecilia’s self and therefore belongs to that self, however unconscious this experience was. In doing so, Burney also suggests that the self might not be confined to consciousness and that the body is also important in one’s perception of his/her identity. See Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*, 897-922.

¹⁷⁷ See Gevirtz 5-7

even less, to perform scientific experiments. Science and philosophy were generally considered unfeminine. However, intellectual progress and free thinking, as properties of the autonomous self, were attractive features for women as well, even though they were excluded from that ideal. One would think that the Declaration of the Rights of Man in France was supposed to apply to all humanity. However, as Mary Wollstonecraft observed with bitterness in her dedication to Talleyrand in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, women did not have an equal right to be educated and seemed to be set apart from all the freedoms and the rights bestowed on human subjects.¹⁷⁸ If the moral philosophy of sympathy and sentiment seemed more interested in women's fates, its insistence on nature was also detrimental to them, because it brought about an increasing belief in immutable natural differences between man and woman. The increasing gender differentiation¹⁷⁹ that occurred in the eighteenth century between women and men amplified and deepened the problems related to personal identity. Rousseau, who advocated at such length for the equality of all people, recommended, however, a very different education for women in *Émile*, based on some doubtful assumptions about their very *different natures*.¹⁸⁰ For him, as well as for other contemporaries, human beings were not at all the same; they fell into two distinct categories that bore different characteristics and functions. However, the idea

¹⁷⁸ See Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. 1-4.

¹⁷⁹ Many scholars have observed that gender differences tended to increase and to become more rigid as the eighteenth century progressed. For instance, according to Dror Wahrman, the image of the amazon, which was regarded as something positive or neutral at the beginning of the century, was explicitly rejected as unfeminine and even disgusting later in the century. He also points out that the metaphor of the beehive, which was very popular in the eighteenth century, underwent a similar evolution, which indicates a new sense of gender difference. Nancy Armstrong demonstrates for her part that gender differences increased in the eighteenth century to replace and mask class struggles and economic inequalities. Julia Park similarly observes an evolution towards more sharp and rigid gender differences over the course of the eighteenth century. See Parks, *The Self and It*; Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth Century England*; Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*.

¹⁸⁰ See Rousseau, *Émile*, 528-558.

that men and women were per nature entirely different as to their identity and that they should be educated differently induced the belief that the identity of women could be lost, and their nature corrupted if they undertook activities that were not designed for them—like science and philosophy— or if they assumed personality traits that supposedly belonged to men. For many philosophers and intellectuals, women who acted in a way that seemed contrary to their supposedly modest and mild nature, were regarded as unattractive, useless hermaphrodites.¹⁸¹ Moreover, the multiple perils that a woman must encounter in society could endanger her personal identity, notably through the deprivation of a family name, a social status, and male protection. Their behavior was indeed so narrowly scrutinized that the least *faux pas* would thwart their respectability and status.¹⁸² In this context, marriage was generally the only way to become a respectable woman and obtain a social identity as wife and mother. On the other hand, to remain a spinster was not a recommended option, because it deprived women of a legitimate status and of a useful social role. As to widowhood, this state was often seen as suspicious, notably if the women

¹⁸¹ Immanuel Kant, in his pre-critical work untitled *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), declares that woman has a beautiful understanding, but not a deep one, and that laborious studies and deep logical research are alien to her kind of intelligence. For him, a woman who would persist in studying arid sciences like physics or who would be a scholar in ancient Greek could hardly be called a woman, but some sort of ambiguous man/woman creature. His opinion on Mme Dacier and Émilie du Châtelet is quite revealing in this respect: « A woman who has a head full of Greek, like Mme. Dacier, or who conducts thorough disputations about mechanics, like the Marquise du Châtelet, might as well wear a beard” (Kant, *Observations* 36-37) (Ak. 2, 229-230). Frances Burney’s *Camilla* illustrates the general prejudices against educated women through the declaration of the young Lynmere: “and what am I to do with marrying a *girl like a boy* (italics mine)? That’s not my taste, my dear sir, I assure you. Besides, what has a wife to do with the classics? Will they show her how to order her table?” (Burney, *Camilla* 592).

¹⁸² Frances Burney’s novels *Evelina*, *Camilla*, and *Cecilia* show repeatedly how perilous and difficult the life of unmarried young women was, how they were continuously the prey of seducers, and how each of their public appearances was threatened by dangers of all sorts. These novels also demonstrate that misinterpretations and misconstructions of a woman’s actions could easily occur and tarnish her reputation. An extreme caution was therefore *de rigueur* for the young women, as was a careful, protective, and caring environment.

did not remarry. Finally, a non-married woman was at the time a curious creature, difficult to fathom.¹⁸³

These remarks lead to a central issue of Enlightenment philosophy: education. Descartes and Locke contributed to the elaboration of the human subject as a being that can be changed and modified through voluntary exertion,¹⁸⁴ or through the influence of sensory impressions and other people's opinions.¹⁸⁵ Locke's image of the mind as a *dark room* (65) or a *white paper* (33) seems to imply that, at birth, humans are nothing definite, but that they become what they are through the impressions they receive from their senses and perceptions, and from the beliefs and habits they acquire through their education.¹⁸⁶ Rousseau's concept of perfectibility also leads to his affirmation of the importance of education in the development of one's identity. For him, perfectibility is a faculty that only

¹⁸³ Jane Austen clearly demonstrates in her novels how marriage was for women in general the only possible option if they wanted to gain independence, status, and a comfortable life. They could not inherit an estate or earn their living with dignity in any other way. Women were then often forced to be mercenary and to put aside their feelings, for the sake of finding a husband. For instance, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte Lucas, chooses to marry the insufferable and rather goofy Mr. Collins, whom she could not love nor esteem, for fear of becoming a spinster, and a burden to her brothers. Even if Elizabeth does not understand Charlotte's cold pragmatism, one could say that, however poor, she is better looking than her friend and probably sufficiently assured of finding a better suitor. However, the end of the novel satisfies all the general demands of the beginning, with most of the Bennet sisters happily married, except Lydia. The coveted Mr. Bingley, "a single man in possession of a fortune," as well as his friend Darcy, have become what they were supposed to be from the beginning, that is, the "rightful property of some or other" of Mrs. Bennet's daughters (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 9).

¹⁸⁴ At the beginning of his *Méditations Métaphysiques*, Descartes presents his decision to get rid of all the doubtful knowledge that he has acquired through education, perception, or social prejudice as a voluntary one. The action of doubting everything is a voluntary trial that he agrees to submit himself to in order to acquire certitude and evidence. By doubting and removing his ancient opinions, Descartes agrees to change his previous self. We can surmise that a new self will emerge from that experience. See Descartes, *Méditations Métaphysiques*, 65.

¹⁸⁵ In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke clearly indicates that all our ideas come from experience. Experience is the fruit of both sensory impressions and the internal perceptions of our mental operations. Before experience, the mind is a "white paper, void of all characters" (Locke 33). Locke also attributes to education, prejudices and culture some of the wrong associations of ideas that beget bad habits and misconduct. See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 172-173.

¹⁸⁶ As James Sambrook remarks, Locke's representation of the mind as a *white paper* "seized the imagination of generations of reformers, inspiring them with the hope of being able to transform the operations of human nature through a reshaping of environment" (Sambrook 48). According to him, philosophers of the Enlightenment followed Locke in their desire to neutralize bad habits or wrong influences caused by their environment and replace them with better ones. (see Sambrook 48)

humans possess and that allows them to transform themselves, adapt to new contexts, and develop new abilities.¹⁸⁷ Although Rousseau's appreciation of perfectibility may seem ambiguous, this faculty being also the source of humans' moral degradation and of the inequalities that render them miserable,¹⁸⁸ it is only through this power of transformation that humans can bring about a just political order in which they can be free and equal.¹⁸⁹

If education can transform and develop human beings, they can also be altered by the influence of others and the pressures of society. While one's transformation can be an improvement, the capacity to remain the same can also appear virtuous and positive. That is why in many eighteenth-century novels, as Patricia Meyers Spacks has remarked, to remain unchanged "constitutes the central character's triumph" (8). One has only to look to Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-48) to be convinced of the accuracy of this statement. The heroine of this eponymous novel has to fight against mostly everyone, except perhaps her best friend, Anna Howe, to remain true to her values and her sense of personal dignity, while nearly everybody wants her to act contrary to her principles. The exhaustion that results from such an enduring battle and the sufferings inflicted upon her by other people's indifference or corruption, lead her to a premature death. However, to the very end, she remains virtuous and does not stray from her own principles, which she ultimately chooses over life. Her principles define what she is and she would prefer death instead of abandoning any of them. However, the eighteenth-century valorization of an uncorrupt and stable identity did not imply that virtue was deemed innate; on the contrary, it seems

¹⁸⁷ For a more complete discussion of perfectibility, see Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, 79-80.

¹⁸⁸ See Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, 80.

¹⁸⁹ The whole project of Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social* is to recover through political means and just laws what humans possessed in their natural state but have lost through a process of bad socialization, notably freedom, equality, and morality. See Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*.

to suggest that what a previous education had achieved could be destroyed by contrary influences. However, for many eighteenth-century philosophers and novelists, a person's identity as well as her character were not only the result of education, society, and culture; they were also rooted in one's natural disposition. As discussed above, many philosophers considered the moral sense, feelings of sympathy and benevolence, and human conscience as genuine and natural human traits. Education was thus crucially important in encouraging good natural dispositions, counteracting bad natural impulses, and fighting the corruption stemming from society and culture. Wollstonecraft affirmed, for instance, that education is of tremendous importance, especially for women, who suffer, according to her, from a debilitating and superficial training that makes them into dependent slaves and creatures of feeling, incapable of sense and judgment.¹⁹⁰ The importance bestowed on education explains why many thinkers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Maria Edgeworth, wrote books about education,¹⁹¹ showing that for eighteenth-century mainstream culture, the progress of humankind depended in large part on the one's capacity to be transformed and educated. The purpose of education was therefore to produce a free rational subject, capable of autonomous thought and sympathy for others.

The convergence of themes and preoccupations between philosophy and literature in the eighteenth century is due in large part to the increased literacy of the public, as described in the preceding chapter, and also to a democratic tendency within philosophy

¹⁹⁰ In the introduction to *A Vindication for the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft clearly states that the flightiness and silliness of most contemporary women is entirely due to their education, which perpetuate their state of weakness and dependency. See Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1-12

¹⁹¹ See Rousseau, *Emile*; Locke, *Some Thoughts on Education*; Edgeworth, *Practical Education*. Vol.1 and 2; Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*.

itself. No longer reserved to the aristocracy or the clergy, philosophical treatises were destined to a wide reading public. Striving to become more popular and accessible, philosophy invaded the cultural mainstream through publications like *The Spectator*, pamphlets, and other works that vulgarized Locke's, or Newton's theories. Philosophers and intellectuals believed that a dissemination of philosophical ideas in the public sphere would improve humankind and contribute to the general impetus towards progress.¹⁹² For instance, Addison's deliberate goal with the *Spectator* was, as we have seen, to bring philosophy out of privileged and closed spaces, to places such as "tea-tables" frequented by a larger public, including women. The popularization of philosophy and the public's increased access to intellectual debates might explain why women, in spite of the limits of their education, managed to grasp some of the main philosophical ideas of the time and to participate, notably through the writing of novels, to the discussion and dissemination of these ideas.

Another factor that might help to explain why novels began to engage more than before with philosophical issues is the somewhat flexible and indeterminate boundaries that existed between genres at the time. While the "novel," as a distinct literary genre, was not completely recognized as a respectable form until the end of the eighteenth century,¹⁹³ a certain ambiguity also existed between novels and history, since both were read as realistic accounts of human life, contrary to romances.¹⁹⁴ According to J. Paul Hunter, the

¹⁹² In his essay *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* Kant presents the diffusion and discussion of ideas in the public sphere as a vector of intellectual and political progress for all humans. He asserts that to renounce to think by ourselves and to impede others to do so is a crime against humanity regarding its right to improvement and progress. See Kant, *What is Enlightenment*, 21.

¹⁹³ See Hunter, *Before Novels. The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*, 22-23.

¹⁹⁴ Michael McKeon remarked that the notion of truth was itself very unstable during the period from the seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century. This uncertainty about truth was responsible for the fluidity that existed at that time between different forms of written works. Some people were not entirely

term 'novel' imposed itself gradually through the eighteenth century. Many authors preferred to call their work a 'history' or a 'romance' instead of a 'novel'. However, the 1750s seemed to have marked an important turning point. After the publication of Richardson's and Fielding's major works, the word 'novel' came into wider use. In 1785, Clara Reeves sanctioned the term when she gave a clear definition of the genre in *The Progress of Romances through Times, Country, and Manners*. In this work, she distinguishes the modern novel from the older form of the romance, stating that the former is a picture of real life, written in everyday language, that tries to persuade the reader of its plausibility, while the latter is a heroic fable, with fabulous characters, featuring impossible or fantastic events.¹⁹⁵ The instability of genres was reinforced by the formal changes, that philosophical writings underwent in the eighteenth-century. Philosophical works tended in this period to distance themselves from the geometrical and logical form of Spinoza's and Leibniz's treatises. A more flexible and fluid form was preferred, one which was sometimes tainted with autobiographical components, or formulated as a dialogue.¹⁹⁶ Various genres, including novels, autobiographies and philosophical essays shared a common claim to represent the truth about personal identity and human life, and consequently distinguished themselves from works of pure fiction. Each genre, in its own

sure whether histories were different from romances or dramas, while others argued for a sharp distinction between these genres. See McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novels*, 25-28.

¹⁹⁵ See Reeves, *The Progress of Romances, through Countries and Manners*, vo.I, 1-27, and vol.II, 50-54.

¹⁹⁶ The works of Denis Diderot, for instance, bore undeniable literary qualities, some of them being written in the form of dialogues and letters. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's first and second discourses were, for their part, closer to a rhetorical essay than a demonstrative theoretical treatise, while David Hume's works, although more argumentative, were of a freer and looser form than the old or traditional metaphysical treatises. As for Berkeley, he chose to express his ideas through dialogue, rather than a demonstrative argumentation. See Denis Diderot, *Lettres sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient* and *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*; Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* and *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*; David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and *A Treatise of Human Nature*; George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues. Hylas and Philonous*.

way, pretended to provide “explanations and insist on the comprehensibility of life” (Spacks 18).

2.6 Burney, Radcliffe, Austen, and Philosophical Ideas of the Self

I have chosen to investigate eighteenth-century women’s engagement with philosophical ideas through the work of three prominent and popular writers of this period: Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen. As discussed in the introduction, this selection is based on the high quality of their novelistic skills, on the popularity of their works, but also on a sort of sisterly filiation between them, suggested by Austen herself in *Northanger Abbey*.¹⁹⁷ Of course, what also brought them together, for the purposes of my argument, is the fact that they all undertake to address the philosophical problems concerning the modern self through acute representations of the subject’s alienation from the world. All their novels ask questions about the self, identity, morality, and education, which were prominent topics of Enlightenment thought. I have selected novelists who span the period from latter half of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century because they bear witness of great transformations and changes in domains such as politics, economy, and society, such as the ascent of the bourgeois class and its values, the valorization of democracy and equality, the development of capitalism and industrialization, and, as a foreground, the French revolution and its aftermath. While none of these women novelists was particularly learned in philosophy, I have demonstrated in the introduction how easy it might have been for each of them to grasp directly or indirectly the most important philosophical ideas that circulated at the time in the public sphere through different mediums.¹⁹⁸ Each of these women writers represents a stage in the

¹⁹⁷ See introduction, 31-33.

¹⁹⁸ See introduction, 33-35.

development of the eighteenth century's articulation of the modern self and its relationships to itself, nature, and society. My task will therefore consist in the description of the changes and the evolution of their conceptions of the self and of personal identity and of the succession of the varied solutions they provide to surmount the isolation of the subject and to combat the frailty of its identity. In Burney's works, female protagonists such as Evelina, Cecilia and Camilla appear to endure perils and pressures from society, without the possibility of relying on free independent agency. They seem for the most part to depend on men for their safety and social recognition, while they are also threatened by them as potential sources of varied perils. Hence, the resentment and the feeling of an imprisoned helplessness which flow, sometimes, from Burney's heroines.¹⁹⁹ For their part, Radcliffe's heroines, even when they are persecuted and chased by male predators, manage to find in nature, poetry, and music, resources for power and resistance, and to manifest a surprising ability to surmount persecution. They do not seem to depend as heavily on men for their security and often prove to be more stable and reliable than their lovers.²⁰⁰ As for Austen, her female heroines appear to attain, through a process of

¹⁹⁹ Cecilia is probably Burney's more disillusioned heroine. She had great means and great ambitions at the beginning of the novel, all of which she finally loses at the end, in order to marry her lover and enter a family, which accepts her with mitigation. For her part, Evelina, deprived of a father and of a decent surname, and thus socially obscure, finds consolation and security only in her marriage and subsequent retreat in the country with her husband, Lord Orville. Camilla, after having been tested and watched scrupulously by her potential lover, Edgar, nearly loses her mind from the fear of disappointing him and her father. She finds consolation, however, in her marriage to Edgar and in the quiet joys of domestic, country life. Finally, Juliet, Burney's last heroine, is the one who endures the worst of fate. Being a stranger in a new country, without money, friends, and name, she is forced to work in difficult conditions where men and women disrespect her and where her life is often in danger. Like Camilla and Evelina, only her final marriage saves her from dangers, precarity, and social disrespect. She also seems to favor a reclusive domestic retreat over an active public life in the world. See, from Frances Burney, *Cecilia; or Memoirs of an Heiress*, *Evelina; or A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, *Camilla; or A Picture of Youth*, *The Wanderer; or Female Difficulties*.

²⁰⁰ It is especially true of Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, who inherits estates from her aunt and her father and who is both wealthier and morally stronger than her lover, Valancourt. If it is not exactly the same for Adeline and Elena, the other most important Radcliffe's female protagonists, their moral force and aesthetic genius gives them agency and initiative. See Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Italian*, and *The Romance of the Forrester*. Austen's heroines, for their part, appear to be more independent from men and

transformation and education, a more stable position in the world than Burney's and Radcliffe's heroines. They surmount their alienation from the world and society by vindicating their place, while avoiding Burney's and Radcliffe's heroines' escape in the domestic sphere or in nature. They achieve therefore a more complete level of agency and autonomy, although they encounter, as well, limitations and frustrations.²⁰¹ I will therefore demonstrate that from Burney to Austen, the ability to know oneself and others is progressively affirmed, from the skeptical perspective of Burney to the more assured view held by Austen. Since the self and one's personal identity are incarnated in a specific body, these three female authors also examine closely the body—most especially the female body— in its relation to the mind, through vectors such as emotions of sympathy, embarrassment, and fear. Although one can discern a progression from the alienation of Burney's heroines to Austen's more optimistic view about the place and the role of women in the world, it is not to be understood as a linear and necessary progression. For instance, some of Burney's female characters are perfectly able to navigate in the world; they show assertiveness, as well as a solid sense of personal identity. However, they remain secondary ones, who are morally imperfect and who occupy a privileged and independent position in society, due to their high rank or money. Conversely, even if there is no central heroine in Austen who ends in tragic death or who lose all social recognition due to fatal errors, one can remark that some secondary female characters lose their reputation and status, like

relatively able, despite serious social and economical obstacles and restraints, to lead the life they want. Of course, marriage is also the ultimate option for them, but it is not perceived as a rescue or as a refuge, but as the installation of a mature collaboration between two compatible and equal individuals. See Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Emma*.

²⁰¹ Austen's heroines such as Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor Dashwood, or Emma Woodhouse, for instance, are all, although differently, aware of their situation in the world and of what they can do and expect from others. Within the limitations of their gender and of their economic status, they manage to get what they want through a process of error, recognition, and growth, and they show a boldness or a force which makes them more autonomous beings.

Maria Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, or come very close to doing so, like Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. However, these difficulties are always due to their own personal defects, and society is never to blame.

Concerning the articulation of body and mind, and reason and emotion, one can also discern another sequential development among these three writers. Their works seem to evolve from a stage of passivity, where the character is torn apart by various opposite and competing feelings—for instance, when Burney's eponymous protagonist, destroyed by emotional pressure, undergoes a mental breakdown in *Cecilia*—to a more active stage, where she learns how to resist and control emotional disturbance. This last stage is characteristic of Austen's prominent female characters, including Elinor and Anne, who come to possess enough sense and judgment to acquire and maintain enduring self-control over their emotions and passions.²⁰² Between these two extremes, we can distinguish a middle stage, less active but not entirely passive, where emotional disturbances and physical pain can be overcome through the help of aesthetic emotions like the beautiful and the sublime. This is the fate of most of Radcliffe's female characters, who show surprising strength in the face of oppression.²⁰³

²⁰² In *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen compares two sisters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, as to their capacity to control their emotions and to act soundly and rationally. While Marianne is completely absorbed and driven by her passions, often to her own detriment and to that of others, Elinor is more on her guard and tries to repress excessive feelings, acting more upon reason and principle. In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot seems to be the only sensible person in her family, all of them being either infatuated by their rank or beauty, or capricious and neurasthenic. Among people who seem mostly thoughtless and silly, Anne shows a remarkable ability to judge rationally and to act benevolently toward others. See Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*.

²⁰³ Emily de St-Aubert, the heroine of Ann Radcliffe's most popular novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, shows an ability to calm herself and endure many frightening and difficult situations through the means of reading, writing poetry and playing the lute. She also draws from nature, in its sublime and beautiful deployments, both courage and hope. See Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

To clearly summarize the characteristics of these three women writers' positions concerning humans and their relationship to the world and others, I will classify their main ideas under different labels. Frances Burney's contribution to the discussion of the philosophical problems to which the modern self is confronted can be classified under the general category of *estrangement and alienation*. For her part, Radcliffe's perspective falls into the category of *aesthetic expansion and solace*, while Austen's view enters the category of *irony and ethical commitment*. The succession of these perspectives follows a dialectic development in which the opposition between body and mind, human and nature, and reason and emotion are the source of new representations of human life. This analysis also focuses on these women writers' use of novelistic techniques to exemplify philosophical problems and envisage for them a set of solutions. The following chapters explore Burney's and Austen's use of irony and heteroglossia, as important means for the discussion of moral and epistemological problems, as well as Radcliffe's use of minute descriptions of beautiful or sublime natural landscapes, as sources of aesthetic emotions through which the characters feel integrated into a vast cosmic order, and in which they find the force to fight despotic and oppressive people and situations.

Chapter Three

Estrangement and Alienation in Frances Burney's Novels

3.1. Frances Burney, the Novel, and the Profound Mystery of the Human Heart

In the preface to her third novel, *Camilla*, Frances Burney affirms the seriousness of her literary enterprise. For her, the novelist is an “investigator of the human heart” (*Camilla* 7). Compared to the historian, who studies human adventures and actions, the novelist’s task appears far more difficult, because it concentrates on inner thoughts and feelings. The novelist’s work, therefore, appears to bear similarities with the enquiries made by modern philosophers, who searched into the subject’s representations and ideas. If the heart is not identical to the mind, both are nevertheless inherent to the subject’s interiority and seem to lay at its core. The novelist seems also to experience the same limitations and doubts encountered by philosophers. This can be explained by the obscurity of his/her object of study. As Frances Burney reckons, the human heart is, “indefinable,” “unfathomable,” “indefensible” (*Camilla* 7), as well as unsteady, contradictory, and perverse. However difficult the task, she maintains that to delineate and approach such a wild and unfathomable phenomenon remains the “sole and discriminate province of the pen” (*Camilla* 7). If philosophers occupy themselves with the workings of the understanding, Burney specifies that novelists are specialists of the human heart, and the heart is not the same thing as the mind. The heart, indeed, seems to refer to something obscure, irrational, and opposed to the rational clarity of the mind. Moreover, Burney’s choice of the term “heart” points to an understanding of the human psyche, which integrates rather than rejects passions, feelings, and emotions, and which does not consist entirely in cognitive faculties. Of course, modern philosophers also studied passions and emotions, but in a descriptive, general way, and always in connection to epistemological problems related to the origin of knowledge or the fundament of morals. Contrary to philosophical

works, novels, according to Burney's description, envisage emotions, intentions, thoughts, as they manifest themselves in concrete individuals, trying to reveal the unconscious or impenetrable motives of their actions. In doing so, the novel exemplifies concretely, in given situations and characters, the incompleteness of philosophical theories about the mind, through its disclosure of the complexity and obscurity of the human heart.

According to Kristen Pond, Burney used the word heart precisely to allude to what is interior (the thoughts and emotions of a human being), as opposed to what is empirically apprehended, the exterior (the face, body, actions, speech, etc.). Following this reading, the heart would designate the deepness of the soul, its interiority, inaccessible through empirical signs.²⁰⁴ This chapter will rethink Pond's claim by exploring the ways in which Burney seems unwilling to separate completely inner phenomena like feelings and thoughts from external ones such as blushing, tottering, fainting, and so forth, even if these empirical traces of the heart may be hard to decipher and may give rise to contradictory interpretations. The interactions of body and soul are subtly and minutely delineated in Frances Burney's novels and give rise, as I will demonstrate, to interesting and genuine views on the notion of personal identity. Finally, by positing novels as the only means to investigate the interiority of human hearts, Burney is also making an aesthetic claim. She states that only novels— not philosophy or history— can provide access to what is hidden

²⁰⁴ Kristen Pond asserts that Frances Burney is very skeptical about what has appeared to be an easy and obvious task for novelists of sensibility, that is, to decipher the human heart. For her, Burney doubts that the heart, which is interior, can be read only through its empirical manifestations such as the countenance, the color of the cheeks, the sound of the voice, etc. She therefore perceives Burney as a critic of novels of sentimentality and as a precursor to the nineteenth-century realist novelist. I don't think that Burney would have assigned to the novelist a task, however difficult, without thinking it possible to achieve. If she warns us in *Camilla* about all the misinterpretations that can arise from false surmises based on empirical signs, she nevertheless uses the novel to expose these errors, to let us see the variety of interpretations and to guess for ourselves what might be the truth behind them. See Pond, "'Fairest Observers' and 'Restless Watchers': Contested Sites of Epistemology in Frances Burney's *Camilla*."

beneath the surface, to the abyss of human's real motives and emotions. If the rational philosophical approach had so far separated humans from the world, the aesthetic approach, could, in the contrary, reunite them. Novels can thus display a form of knowledge wholly different from the rational, demonstrative truths attained by philosophers. Displaying the human's heart, it also appeals, through aesthetical means, to the "heart" of the reader. The reader therefore grasped through the emotions he/she feels sympathetically toward the characters a form of truth which, being subjective, does not bear the form of a universal, rational, discursive knowledge. This sort of understanding is close to what Martha Nussbaum calls *love's knowledge*.²⁰⁵

The importance of Frances Burney in British literary history is widely recognized today. Since the late 1980s, Many scholars have enriched our knowledge of Burney's works. However, her ambitious anthropological as well as epistemological claim concerning novels and her engagement with eighteenth-century debates about the human

²⁰⁵ As seen in chapter one, p.79-80, Martha Nussbaum advocates for complementary relations between philosophy and literature and claims that literature, notably novels, contains a knowledge about human life that is more concrete and complex than the one presented by philosophical works. By their metaphorical use of language and through the emotions felt by the readers toward the novel's protagonists, literary works enable readers to understand moral perplexities and the inexorability of tragic choices through the illumination provided by emotions and love. See Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*.

²⁰⁵ Following the important works of Margaret Doody and Julia Epstein, who demonstrate the importance of Burney's work as a testimony of the difficult condition of women and of women's writers in eighteenth-century England, other monographies about the work of Frances Burney have appeared which engaged with her life as a writer as well as with the characteristics of her writings. One must also add the many journal articles published on her work, which display an interest in some particular topics of her life and of her writings, such as her dealings with illness and doctors, her view of economical negotiations, her stay at the court of king George, her satirist impulse, etc. See Margaret M. Doody, *Frances Burney. The Life in the Works*; Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen. Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing*; Hester Davenport, *Faithful Handmaid: Fanny Burney at the Court of King George*; Claire Harmen, *Fanny Burney: A Biography*; Kate Chishom, *Fanny Burney: Her Life, 1752-1840*; Janice Farar Thaddeus, *Frances Burney. A Literary Life*; Marcie Frank, "Frances Burney's Theatricality"; Peter Sabor (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burne*; Allen Ingram, "Frances Burney and the Doctors: Patient Narratives there and Now";

mind, have never been the subject of a thorough enquiry.²⁰⁶ This chapter is concerned about that claim and about how she manages in her novels to disclose important truths about the human subject, while engaging at the same time with the philosophical theories of her time.

3.2. Epistemological Problems about the Self, the Other, and the World

As explained in the introduction, the relation of the self to others and to the world, as well as the difficulty to know oneself and to know others were important topics of philosophical thought during the modern period and the Enlightenment. These difficulties arose mostly from the new perspectives about knowledge that philosophers such as Descartes and Locke developed. For them, knowledge took its source in the human subject, rather than in a transcendent objective order or in a transcendent being.²⁰⁷ This subjective turn, which came, as already explained, from the transformation of the human mind into a “subject” and of the world at large into a mere “object” of human thought,²⁰⁸ had some consequences: the alienation and isolation of the self, a growing skepticism about the

Julian Fung, “Frances Burney as a Satirist”; Roy Devjani, “Frances Burney’s Financial Negotiations in the Wanderer.” Very few publications on Burney are focused on the relationships of her novels with eighteenth-century philosophical or scientific ideas. There are articles about Burney and Edmund Burke concerning their opinions on imperialism and colonialism, others concerning her use of Linnean taxonomy or of mechanical understanding of humans, but none addresses her will to discuss seriously in her novels eighteenth-century philosophical ideas about the self and personal identity. See Sophie Coulombeau, “‘A philosophical Gossip’: Science and Sociability in Frances Burney’s *Cecilia*”; Betsy Bolton, “Imperial Sensibilities, Colonial Ambivalence: Edmund Burke and Frances Burney”; Julie Park, “Pains and Pleasure of the Automaton: Frances Burney’s Mechanics of Coming out.”

²⁰⁷ According to Charles Taylor, “our modern notion of the self is related to, and constituted by, a certain sense or inwardness” (111). Instead of turning its mind toward a cosmic order or a supersensible world of Ideas, the self reaches its moral sources from within. For Taylor, Descartes was surely an influential pioneer of this internalization of knowledge. According to Taylor, the modern representation of knowledge tends to situate it in the ideas of the mind. However, the correspondence of these ideas with external objects may be doubted. See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 143-145.

²⁰⁸ See introduction, 27-28.

possibility of a thorough knowledge of the world and other people, and the uncertainty of one's continuing identity over time.²⁰⁹

Philosophers were well aware of these difficulties. For instance, Descartes tried to extricate himself from absolute solipsism by resorting to God's perfection and power. If he discovered the thinking subject as the first thing that cannot be doubted, the ability of this thinking subject to assert the existence of anything but himself remains highly problematic.²¹⁰ A proof of God's existence appeared therefore necessary, and Descartes deduced it from our innate idea of God. According to him, if we can form all the ideas that we have, merely by reflecting on ourselves, or through sensorial experience, "il ne reste que la seule idée de Dieu, dans laquelle il faut considérer s'il y a quelque chose qui n'ait pu venir de moi-même" (*Méditations métaphysiques* 117). He further explains that by the name God we understand "une substance infinie, éternelle, immuable, indépendante, toute connaissante, toute puissante" (*Méditations métaphysiques* 117). These characteristics are not actually present in human beings; these qualities must come, rather, from a being who possesses them effectually and who, by necessity, exists. The existence of God, thus demonstrated, implies the impossibility that, in his infinite goodness, he would have deceived us completely regarding the existence of the world and our capacity to know it. We might therefore conclude that the world outside us is real, instead of being a mere illusion.

What Descartes provides as a solution may not seem highly satisfying, because it supposes once again, that there needs to be a sort of transcendent objective source to

²¹⁰ After having doubted everything that he has perceived or thought, Descartes is obliged to acknowledge the absolute certainty of his own existence, which cannot be doubted without contradiction. See Descartes, *Méditations métaphysiques*, 79-81.

ascertain our feeble and erring mind. The subject is unable to provide such a guarantee. This dependence on God also concerns the subject's continued existence through time. Its sustainability depends on the punctual act of thinking²¹¹ and rests ultimately on God's act of continuous creation. According to Descartes, men are unable to create and sustain their own existence, because "de ce qu'un peu auparavant j'ai été, il ne s'ensuit pas que je doive maintenant être, si ce n'est qu'en ce moment quelque chose me produit et me crée, pour ainsi dire, derechef, c'est-à-dire me conserve" (*Méditations métaphysiques* 123). In fine, the Cartesian position is that the self, on which all our knowledge relies, is in fact unable to attest to the existence of the world and of other human beings without God. Moreover, its very existence depends on God's continuous creation. These conclusions relativize significantly the importance of the modern subjective turn by throwing major doubt on the subject's cognitive capacities and autonomy. While Descartes prophesizes, that humans will become "maîtres et possesseurs de la Nature" (*Discours de la Méthode* 84), he nevertheless admits that this mastery is uncertain and depends ultimately on God's will.

The empiricist tradition, beginning with John Locke, looks at the problem of the mind and of knowledge differently, because it envisions the source of knowledge as stemming from experience, instead of innate ideas. For Locke, the mind is nothing in itself; deprived of any innate ideas, it is "an empty cabinet" (11) or a "white paper" (33), which remains to be filled with ideas obtained through sensations and reflections. For him, the ideas that we have about the world and ourselves have two distinct sources: 1) our senses, through which we receive images of external objects, and 2) our power of reflection,

²¹¹ Descartes links the knowledge of our own existence to our act of thinking. Therefore, he evokes the possibility that if we were unable to think, there would not be any proof left of our existence. See Descartes, *Méditations métaphysiques*, 83.

through which we perceive the operations of our own minds. He explains, “These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the *ideas* we have, or can naturally have, do spring” (Locke 33). Unfortunately, that does not mean that all our ideas about the world or the self are objective. For Locke, the simple ideas coming from sensations do not always resemble their related objects. The primary qualities of objects, like bulk, figure, and motion, are real properties of these objects and resemble them. However, the secondary qualities of objects, like color, taste, smell, or sound are purely subjective and do not correspond to any property in the objects themselves. The objects simply have the power to produce these sensory ideas in our minds. As Locke clearly states, “*light, heat, whiteness, or coldness, are no more really in them, than sickness or pain is in manna*” (51). We can therefore conclude that they are not objective properties, but merely subjective ones. Locke nonetheless maintains that these ideas are real because they arise in our minds from the action of a certain power in the object. However, he admits that their reality is *in us* and that they do not represent “what does exist” (Locke 158). He also examines the case of complex ideas, which are not the result of sensation or perception, but rather “voluntary combinations” (Locke 158), arranged according to some principles of association. Some of them are real but they can also be unreal, when for instance, they refer to nothing that exists materially in the world and are therefore fantastical, like a chimera or a centaur. However, real ideas of substances can also be inadequate to the object they are supposed to represent. Inadequate representations of substances occur when humans unite a variety of simple ideas into one complex idea of a substance. The connection between these simple ideas and their attribution to a common substance as if they belong to that substance is only derived from the common perception of their always being together. However, because

the substance from which these qualities are supposed to derive cannot be observed, the inference as to its existence cannot be made. Therefore, the idea of this substance cannot be accepted as real. For Locke, therefore, concepts of general essences or substances are only words that we use continually, believing in their veracity, while they refer to nothing that exists. This position induces him to say, skeptically, that, “men are ignorant” (Locke 162) of the real essence of “man,” even though they identify themselves with that idea. However, the most prominent source of error is to be found for Locke in unreasonable associations of ideas. Every human is prone to this sort of irrationality. For Locke, madness is a common feature of humans. As he writes, “there is scarce a man so free from it” that he should be regarded sometimes as “fitter for *Bedlam*, than civil conversation” (173). Through inclination, custom, habit and prejudice, humans make wrong associations of ideas, which become very hard to disentangle or separate from each other because, in their minds, they “always keep company” (Locke 173). These connections, however, are only accidental, referring to no objective relations between things in the world.

Finally, regarding the mind itself, conceived as a mere receptacle of fluctuating and successive ideas, its unity and identity, for Locke, can only be found in consciousness, which has the power to unite past memories to the actual state of the mind and connect all the different states of a person’s life. The self is, therefore, for Locke, that “conscious thinking thing” (143) which is sensible, experiences pleasure or pain, happiness and misery, and cares for itself, “as far as its consciousness extends” (143). As one can observe, the Lockean definition of the self as consciousness is not very far from Descartes’s notion of the self as a thinking substance. The fact that he refutes innate ideas and places the origin of our ideas in the senses does not estrange him totally from the rationalist tradition.

When it comes to the self, these two influential modern philosophers seem to agree that identity lies on the mind and not in the body. However, Locke problematizes identity considerably more than Descartes does. First, he distinguishes the *person* and the *man*. Following this distinction, someone may lose his or her *personal* identity while being “the same man” (142). The “man” refers to precise material and bodily characteristics that can make someone recognizable. On the other hand, the “person” relates to consciousness, something that does not appear to others empirically. Hence, the body can be changed, even replaced by another, without affecting the identity of the person. For instance, according to Locke, the same *person* could inhabit two different bodies and belong to different *men*.

However, to place the identity of the person in consciousness alone implies that if one has lost the memory of his past or the consciousness of himself as being one with this past in the present moment, one can no longer be the same person than he previously was, but rather becomes another. A drunken man and a sober man may indeed be the same man, but they are different people, because one is conscious of being the same as before in a continuous manner, while the other may not be. Personal identity is therefore fragile and can be interrupted by the temporary or permanent loss of consciousness. While the two founders of modern philosophy affirmed to some extent the possibility of an objective knowledge of the world, both were aware of the limits of this knowledge and of the possibility that our ideas may not refer exactly to what exists in the world, and that our representations of it may be partly or totally illusory. They also knew that the very foundation of our knowledge, the conscious subject, was not necessarily stable and

continuous. For them, the thinking and conscious self could hardly attest or support its own identity and existence through time.

The skepticism about knowledge and personal identity grew even more intense later on with the radical empiricism of David Hume, for whom our knowledge of the empirical world is merely a subjective belief based on repeated experiences. For him, our knowledge of matters of fact carries no objective certainty. Hume explains that this sort of knowledge relies on causation. Unfortunately, the relation of cause and effect cannot be observed in the objects themselves, as if some of them would possess a mysterious inner power of causation. As he remarks, “objects have no discoverable connection together” (*Treatise* 63). The relation of cause and effect is, rather, postulated by humans in order to account for their repeated experiences of the succession of two events or objects. In consequence of that, Hume affirms that we draw our causal inferences from “any other principle but custom” (*Treatise* 63). Given that all our knowledge of the outside world is grounded on subjective beliefs that cannot be objectively observed, it follows, according to Hume, that the world remains for humans distant and impenetrable. Of course, the self does not escape this epistemological pessimism. Nothing remains for Hume of its sameness and stability: human’s consciousness of a permanent and identical self is an illusion that philosophical inspection can easily dissipate. Hume’s argument is, basically, that there is no impression that can relate to something called the self, conceived as a stable, permanent entity from which our thoughts and sensations arise. On the contrary, what humans experience are multiple and successive impressions of thought, pain, pleasure, emotion, and sensation. For Hume, therefore, one can never apprehend the self as a continuous and stable entity; he/she only has access to particular impressions, singular sensations, or a given thought. For

Hume, we are then forced to conclude that what we call the self is nothing but “a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity” (*Treatise* 134). If our mind produces the conception of a stable self, it is not due to any impression of the self, but it is rather founded on the action of the imagination, which unites different perceptions of our thoughts, emotions, and sensations into one unit, as if there was some permanent *substratum* from which they arise. From this, it follows, according to Hume, “that identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only fictitious” (*Treatise* 137). Not only did Hume doubt that we could have any sort of knowledge of the objects outside of us, but he also extended this skepticism to our knowledge of ourselves. The *modern predicament* therefore could be termed as the impossibility to experience and know the real world, to know ourselves and be sure of our own personal continuity through time, and to connect with others, because of our subjective estrangement from them and of the limits of our power of knowing.

3.3 The Modern Predicament and the Novel

As we have seen, Frances Burney makes a cognitive claim about novels, presenting the novelist as an investigator of the human heart. Her declared ambition to explore and reveal in her novels “the human heart” expresses her conviction that literature, most specifically novels, can reveal important “truths” about humans. She therefore envisaged her work as parallel and, therefore, as a contributing effort to the philosophical and scientific eighteenth-century theories about the human subject. Her objective, more precisely, is to reveal the problems that such an eminent and absolute position of the human subject fatally incur, and to discuss its subsequent alienation from the world and the slow crumbling of one’s personal identity. As discussed in chapter one, the estrangement of the subject from the world and his multiple attempts to coincide with it are, for Georg Lukàcks,

the central preoccupation of the novel, considered as a modern genre derived from ancient Epic. For him, unlike Odysseus who integrated into his world organically, the novel's hero experiences "transcendental homelessness" (Luckàcs 26). According to Luckàcs, "The epic individual, the hero of the novel, is the product of estrangement from the outside world" (28). This estrangement is, paradoxically, what makes him an individual, a "subject," who has an interiority that is opposed to the world and who possesses certain personality traits. Exploring the isolation and alienation of the modern self through her novels, Burney's work truly exemplifies this characterization of the novel. For her, despite all the philosophical attempts to grasp the human mind, without the workings of novels, there would be no access to the depth of the human heart. Without them, one could not comprehend entirely what it is for someone to feel isolated from the world and isolated from others. Therefore, the study of Burney's novels will enable me to demonstrate that the philosophical problem of the separation of the subject and the world, and the epistemic problem of the access to other people's minds and feelings are not things that can be understood completely and potentially overcome through mere philosophical means. They can only come to be better understood, in all of their contradictions and complexities, through aesthetic investigation and through literary texts. Starting from this premise, I would like to investigate, first, how Frances Burney's novels explore the hiatuses between the subject and the world and the problem of knowing ourselves and others. I then explore how she manages to offer a more concrete and vivid representation of these problems and their complexity, which help significantly in completing and diversifying philosophical views. However, she does not necessarily offer any solutions to the quandaries posed by the subject's alienation from the world. Her specific contribution consists precisely in her

profound skepticism concerning any possible overcoming of the gap dividing humans from each other and from the world.

3.4. The Alienated Heroine in Frances Burney's Novels

Each of Frances Burney's novels features a central heroine whose name figures prominently in the title.²¹² These female protagonists are all young, and they are introduced as they are about to quit the protection of their home to enter into the world. The world into which they are making their entrance is ruled by men and functions according to a set of unquestioned customs and principles, most of which these young women ignore. In Burney's novels, the alienated position of the modern subject, his/her separation from the outside world and other humans is represented paradigmatically through the figure of the young female debutante. Burney's characterization of the alienated subject as a woman, instead of a man, tends to radicalize this estrangement and to accentuate the pathos of homelessness that the novel's hero generally feels. The alienation of the modern subject is therefore represented in Burney's novels through the perspective of the sex, which was, at that time, the most alienated: women.²¹³

²¹² Burney's first three novels all bear the name of their female protagonists: *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), *Cecilia; or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), and *Camilla; or a Picture of Youth* (1796). Burney's last novel, *The Wanderer: or Female Difficulties* (1814) does not refer explicitly to the heroine's name in the title. However, the heroine is referred to symbolically as the wanderer.

²¹³ It must be observed that Burney's protagonists all belong to the middle or higher classes of society. They are well-read, educated and accomplished. They adhere primarily to puritan values and seem the embodiment of conventional feminine qualities such as modesty, sweetness, chastity, and propriety, which were praised at the time in England. However, confined to the domestic sphere, middle- to upper- class women developed, as seen in Chapter 1, an estranged and radical perspective on the world. Therefore, contrary to the majority of canonical eighteenth-century philosophical treatises, which display, despite their attempts at objectivity, evident masculine bias, Burney's novels represent humans and the world from an educated and privileged, although economically and politically powerless, feminine perspective. Being estranged and marginal, this perspective is inevitably partially critical of the common philosophical views concerning humans, personal identity, and knowledge. (My use of the terms feminine and masculine here refers to the qualities that are traditionally attributed to men and women and that are socially constructed. On the other hand, male and female are terms which refer to the sexes).

Burney's novels may therefore be understood as female *Bildungsromans*²¹⁴ in which unfortunate and bashful heroines have to learn how to behave in the world, understand its social codes, decipher other people's thoughts and demands, and navigate safely through it. This new perspective, where female protagonists are not doomed to fall but learn and improve through their experiences of the world, is what makes Burney's novels "post-Richardsonian" narratives (Jones XIV). I will demonstrate that their tottering and difficult beginnings in the world serve as literary representations of the epistemic and anthropological separation of the subject from the world, which was being conceptualized in modern philosophical thought. My claim is that Burney's heroines embody the subject's inability to understand the world, and the meaning of its rules as well as the thoughts and intentions of others. I would also like to suggest that her novels, through the difficulties and struggles of their female characters, echo the strong skepticism that modern philosophy was in the process of formulating with regards to the possibility to know the world and others. Burney's novels also achieve a vivid representation of the isolation and potential solipsism of the detached, separated subject. In order to demonstrate my point more precisely and concretely, I will discuss key passages from Burney's first novel, *Evelina* (1778), as well as important episodes from her second novel, *Cecilia* (1782).

Evelina; or a Young Woman's Entrance into the World, relates the story of a country orphan girl who makes her entrance into the world through a series of blunders,

²¹⁴ It is well recognized that eighteenth-century novels written by women were in large part *Bildungsromans* in the sense that they presented young women's coming of age, and their entry into the world of adults, before their marriage. This was also, according to K. Binhammer, a common theme of sentimental novels, where young female protagonists were exposed to the snares and demands of men. Because of the sexual nature of the threats to which these heroines were submitted, Binhammer calls these novels "sexual bildungsroman". See Binhammer, "Later Fiction", 180. However, because the protagonists of these novels were female, their journey from adolescence to womanhood remained problematic. As Jane Spencer has remarked, the heroine of eighteenth-century novels never accedes to majority and autonomy, even in marriage. She remains "a perpetual minor". See Spencer, "Evelina and Cecilia," 30

mistakes, and embarrassments.²¹⁵ Having quitted her guardian, the Reverend Villars, to visit her friends the Mirvans, Evelina follows them for a short journey to London. She is not well prepared to enter society, having no experience of fashionable social events and having lived a very retired life. Her social status is problematic, since her natural father, a nobleman, has refused to acknowledge her. Having lost mother long ago, she is also devoid of a proper name and of any familial connections. All of these factors contribute to make her social status ambiguous and to augment her shyness and clumsiness in society. The first social event in which Evelina participates in London is a ball. At this ball, the “world” not only appears to Evelina as governed by mysterious sets of rules, but also as displaying an inversion and deformation of the usual conventions of language.

Her first such linguistic astonishment relates to the language used by the London fashionable world to describe a ball or to address a potential dance partner. The apparent disconnection between the words being used and the things they are supposed to represent surprises her greatly. It starts with the use of the term *private* to describe a ball where, instead of the four or five couples she expects, she beholds what seems to her “half of the world!” (30). The common meaning of *private* is distorted and diverted from its original sense of a “few people we know” towards a new sense of “a numerous but chosen society.” A simple and straightforward person from the country is not prepared for such bifurcations of meaning. Evelina must fear that her language is not adequate for the world into which she enters. She also suspects this language to be a false and hypocrite veil dissimulating the real relationships that occur among humans. For instance, she cannot but wonder about

²¹⁵ The term “world” is used here in the sense it has in Burney’s novels. It does not mean the entire *cosmos*, but, more narrowly, society or the nexus of human relationships. We can also designate it as a human cosmos opposed to nature.

the so-called “honour” she might confer to a man by letting him have her hand. A young woman like her, totally unexperienced and ignorant, could not really “honour” an important gentleman of the world. The epithet seems preposterous, and Evelina feels as if the adjective is used only to operate a reversal of the real situation, where the one really honored is her, who has been chosen for a dance partner by such an eminent Lord. As she concludes, “these sort of expressions, I find, are used as words of course, without any distinctions of persons, or study of propriety” (31). At her first ball, Evelina discovers that language is not to be trusted, because people seem to use it freely, without proper attention to its meaning or appropriate usage. If words do not correspond to the same referent depending on the persons and situations, then it seems difficult to believe that they are able to represent the world as it is. On the contrary, words increase the alienation and the feeling of estrangement felt by the novel’s heroine. Burney’s insistence on the various usages of words, as well as on the eclectic jargon used by fashionable people or professionals, is meant to warn readers about the gap that exists between language and the world. Manipulated freely and without any correspondence to a common usage, language can be a powerful means of alienation. However, instead of willing to correct language and banish all its abusive uses, as Locke did,²¹⁶ or to dream about a potential simple, universal, and objective language, as Descartes imagined,²¹⁷ Burney seems merely to point out the

²¹⁶ Locke is persuaded that language is imperfect and that the meaning of words can always be doubted. Language is meant to communicate our ideas to other people, but we can never know for sure if the same word used by two persons corresponds in their heads to the same ideas. This problem is due to the fact that words are not naturally tied to the ideas they represent; they are only conventions used to express our personal ideas. See Locke 205. Locke also warns us about the abuse of words, which can occur through multiple causes, such as an “unsteady application of them” (209) and an “inconstancy” (209) in their usage.

²¹⁷ In a letter to Marin Mersenne, Descartes expresses both his disappointment about the actual state of language and its use, which is full of obscurities and uncertainties, and his dream of a universal language that would correspond to simple and clear ideas in our minds. He is nevertheless skeptic as to the possibility of ever seeing such a language in use due to the difficulty of dividing all complex ideas into simple and clear

playful and misleading functions of language, without advocating for a purification of its use. For her, the site where language attains its true function of illumination (instead of dissimulation) is in artistic prose, such as in novels, where it becomes a means to construct fictions into which human thoughts and emotions can appear to us in all their subtlety and complexity. Language can mislead but it can also, through literary works, illuminate and disclose truths, illustrating how complexity and depth are not reducible to logic and discursive thought. As I explain in the beginning of this chapter, literary language, as opposed to its common usage or its manipulations by social groups, has the power to reveal the mystery of the heart, and to investigate its depths, instead of alienating us from ourselves, others, and society. Literary language discloses truths and help to reconnect us with the world.

3.5 Laughter as a Mode of Revelation: Evelina as *Fool*

At her first ball, Evelina realizes that people and customs are as strange and alien as the language they speak. At the beginning of the ball, Evelina is approached by a pedantic and conceited fop whose manners and deportment she finds repulsive and ridiculous. The description she gives of this man in her letters shows vividly the contempt she feels towards him. She relates his gradual, codified, and conventional moves toward her minutely and ironically. First, she explains that “a young man, who had for some time look at [her] with a kind of negligent impertinence” (Burney, *Evelina* 30), decided, with “a set smile on his face” (31), to address her. Then, she describes his theatrical and exaggerated gestures when he finally asks her to dance: “Bowing to the ground, with a sort

ones. He concludes that if that language was possible, it would require “de grands changements en l’ordre des choses, et il faudrait que tout le monde ne fût qu’un paradis terrestre, ce qui n’est bon à proposer que dans le pays des romans” (Descartes, *Choix de Lettres* 31).

of swing, and waving his hand with the greatest conceit, after a short and silly pause, he said, ‘Madam—may I presume? —’ (31) Confronted with such artificial posturing, the simple, natural, and naïve Evelina is seized with an irresistible desire to laugh. She manages to conceal her laughter by turning her head to Mrs. Mirvan and begging to be excused. However, because of the young gentleman’s insistence, she is obliged to declare that she will not dance at all. The fellow, a consummate actor, then utters “ridiculous speeches of sorrow and disappointment, though his face still wore the same invariable smile” (31). Faced with such behavior, she “could scarce forbear laughing” (30). This episode from the ball is very significant, because it demonstrates that, however naïve, Evelina is wise enough to see through hypocrisy and false sentiments. She is also able to lift the veil of affected politeness and gallantry and reveal the conceitedness and selfishness that stands behind. The social world appears therefore to her as a set of codified rituals, displaying highly theatrical gestures and speaking in an affected and unnatural jargon. In such a world she feels uncomfortable, alien, and misplaced. In this context, her laughter is a direct and spontaneous response to what she perceives to be absurdities and affectations. However, as Vivien Jones remarks, Evelina’s laughter is ambiguous. It is both “the critical laughter of satire” (xviii) and “the giggle of embarrassment” (xviii). These two dimensions of Evelina’s laughter increase the irony of her posture, in which the distance of satire is expressed in the language of surprised innocence. Therefore, Evelina’s propensity to laugh becomes in the hands of the author a powerful literary tool which reveals what lays behind appearances, cracking the surface of codified mores and languages in a way that lets the masks fall.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ For an explanation of the role of fools in novels according to Bakhtin, see chapter one, 47.

The laughter, gently repressed in the beginning of the ball, increases in force through time and eventually bursts aloud, to Evelina's own amazement. There is a moment during the ball when her puzzlement and wonder at such artificial and masqueraded customs and speech reaches a climax. Having been asked to dance by another gentleman of a more pleasing appearance, Lord Orville, and having accepted his request, Evelina finds soon enough that she has contravened an important rule of assemblies, which consists in never "refusing one partner, and afterwards accepting another" (35). Notwithstanding what this rule reveals of the freedom allowed to young ladies for the choice of a partner, it was generally accepted as a mandatory rule of polite society, which no one could ignore. This is why Lord Orville does not suspect for one moment that Evelina could have behaved in such an improper way. As he says to the affronted beau, Mr. Lovel, "This lady, Sir, is incapable of meriting such an accusation!" (35)

Although she is ashamed to have misbehaved and to have appeared impolite and ill-bred in front of Lord Orville, Evelina is incapable of taking these matters seriously and understanding properly where lies the impropriety of preferring to dance with one partner instead of another. Her amazement in the face of both gentlemen is so genuine that she cannot forbear to give way to a burst of laughter, which, of course, aggravates her already precarious situation. When her first admirer, Mr. Lovel, tries to insinuate that she has preferred the conversation of someone else to the one he would have the "honour to offer" (34), she interrupts him with her laughter. In her letter to her guardian, Mr. Villars, she admits that she "could not help it" (34) and that the extreme preciosity and foppishness of the discourse and manners of Mr. Lovel, "who took snuff every three words" (34), joined to the surprise of Lord Orville to see her laugh so heartily, which redoubled her amusement.

One might even say that Orville's astonished face is what most amused her because, as she writes, the cause of it "appeared so absurd" (34). As an author who aims at verisimilitude and naturalness in her depiction of situations, language, and characters, Burney uses Evelina's reaction, notably her laughter, to denounce the unnatural, affected, artificial, and absurdity of manners of fashionable London society, as well as the theatrical and pompous way in which some people choose to act and express themselves in those spheres. In doing so, she affirms that artificiality and mannerism are not only to be found in literary works like romances; they are also prominent features of the social world. In representing these comic scenes, she implies that "veracity" and "naturalness" can be hard to find, even in the "real" world.

However, the irruption of laughter, and the bewilderment of the two men when faced with such an inappropriate reaction on the part of a *lady*,²¹⁹ have the power to break the surface of coded and artificial behavior in order to reveal the abyss of nothingness on which it is grounded. That the "world" is a ritualized masquerade established to hide the selfish and egotist behavior of humans and the relations of power underlying it, is suddenly revealed by laughter. As discussed in chapter one, this sort of revelation, for Bakhtin, is

²¹⁹As Vivien Jones explains, "The rules of politeness disallowed uncontrolled laughter in public—particularly women's laughter" (Jones xviii). Propriety and decorum exerted powerful constraints on women's spontaneity and expressivity. Because of these social constraints, women had to be very careful and prudent. They were to speak very little and remain modest. All these rules of propriety were formulated in conduct books. Conduct books for women were very popular in the eighteenth century. This genre seemed to have encountered an unprecedented success. If men wrote some of these books, women were also writers of conduct books, notably Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth. Reverends and ministers of the church wrote many of them, such as Father Gregory, for instance, and the Reverend James Fordyce. In his famous opus, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1761, Father Gregory told his daughters that they should aspire to the kind of "virtue" their deceased mother possessed and put on a gentleness of spirit and manners. He advocates strongly for modesty and reserve: "This modesty, which I think so essential in your sex, will naturally dispose you to be rather silent in company, especially in a large one" (Gregory 12). To laugh loudly and immoderately was certainly not part of the definition of a modest and silent behavior. See John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*; James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*.

usually performed in satirical novels by characters who appear to others as fools. In this particular episode of the novel, Evelina appears as the fool, that is, the one who is unable to understand the conventions and language of good society and its “lofty-pathos-charged labels, things and events” (Bakhtin 402). Evelina’s irrepressible laugh tears off the mask of Lovel’s foppish vanity and conceitedness, dissimulated under layers of theatrical fuss and precious language. It also exposes the absurdity of these assemblies’ rules concerning proper behavior and decorum, which even a sensible man such as Orville obeys scrupulously. The world in which Evelina enters seems, indeed, a disincarnated and artificial world, structured by a fictitious language, ritualistic gestures, and absurd codes. One cannot but wonder how an honest, simple human being can attempt to participate in such a world.

3.6 Personal Identity, Social Nothingness, and the Epistolary Form

Evelina is Burney’s only novel written in epistolary form.²²⁰ As I will explain, the epistolary form plays an important role in the novel with regards to the representation of the self and identity. In the following section, I show how it produces the illusion of intimacy and authenticity, while revealing unconscious and involuntary thoughts or feelings. However, one should note that the first letters of the novel are not written by Evelina, but by her guardian, the Reverend Mr. Villars. Through them, the reader is acquainted with the latter’s reluctance to let his ward quit the country and enter London society. Mr. Villars fears that such a departure from his protection would prove fatal to Evelina. He imputes her late mother’s sad fate to the dangers of the world and sees the

²²⁰ Margaret Doody demonstrates how Frances Burney experimented significantly with the novel form throughout her literary career. Following her first epistolary novel, she tried her hand at third-person narration for the three others, and even resorted to the technique of free indirect speech, which Jane Austen would go on to perfect. See Margaret Doody, *Frances Burney. The Life and the Work* 3.

precarious and obscure situation of the girl, an orphan whose natural father did not acknowledge her, as disadvantageous and dangerous. He fears that her social ambiguity will make her an easy prey for men of libertine tendencies. The Reverend knows that a young woman without a father, and consequently without a name, will appear as a “nobody” (*Evelina* 37). For most eighteenth-century British men or women, a person like Evelina would have had no social existence. Being socially insignificant, no particular respect is due to her, and she can be easily disregarded.

However, this social erasure is compensated in the novel by the possibilities of the epistolary form, which enables the reader to access something that resembles Evelina’s true intimate self. In her letters, she discloses to the reader her inner thoughts, fantasies, and emotions, even the ones she might not want to reveal.²²¹ Evelina’s personal identity is disclosed and asserted through her letters. The consciousness she has of being the same through time— what Locke envisages as constituting personal identity— is consigned on a paper and addressed to a potential reader. Evelina’s identity, however hermetic to the other characters, and however socially doubtful, is affirmed in her letters and made immediately accessible to the reader, with all its foibles, naïvetés, and obscurities. For herself and for the reader who sympathizes with her, she is not a “nobody”; rather, she possesses a real enduring existence. She appears in her letters as the same person who quits her country refuge for London, who meets Lord Orville and is anxious to please him, who experiences malice and sexual harassment, and who is embarrassed by foolish and

²²¹ Evelina’s amorous inclination towards Lord Orville is never openly admitted or stated before the end of the novel. However, she betrays her feelings constantly in her letters, notably by describing the constant fear she has to appear foolish or giddy before him. The mortification she expresses when she relates in one of her letters what he has said about her is revealing: “‘*A poor weak girl!*’ ‘*Ignorant or mischievous!*’ What mortifying words!” (Burney, *Evelina* 38).

egoistic behavior from her newfound relatives, the Branghtons, and her grandmother, Mme Duval. The letters are the thread by which all previous and subsequent events, thoughts and feelings are related and united under the I of the epistoler.

However, the self and identity claimed by Evelina in her letters lack social recognition and a proper name, so that at the same time that she asserts her existence and identity through her writings, she is denied any proper social existence by others, for instance, gentlemen of the world, fashionable ladies, and her own natural father. Moreover, the fact that Evelina's letters are nonetheless parts of a work of fiction undermine any pretension they might have at being a real personal testimony. However, her situation in the novel illustrates paradigmatically the alienation that a person must face and the potential solipsism into which she may fall when her existence, revealed to her through self-reflection (like that outlined in Descartes' *Cogito*), appears at the same time as an idiosyncratic illusion, a dream that no other shares, in a world in which she feels excluded. Therefore, although she experiences both the Cartesian inner certitude of oneself and the Lockean consciousness of being the same through all her past and actual experiences, she faces the other's reluctance to acknowledge her and their failure to know who she is. Evelina *knows* who her real father is, and that her parents were legally married before her father chose to get rid of the marriage certificate and plunge her mother and herself into a distressful situation, provoking her mother's death. However, this information remains inaccessible to others, who may surmise that she is an illegitimate child, that her mother was probably a fallen woman of small virtue, and that she is herself dispossessed of any social identity and dignity and deprived of any protection. They may suppose many things on her behalf and imagine freely who she is or can be from their own mercenary

perspectives. These speculations may extend to her personality as well because what she reveals herself to be in her letters may not appear accordingly in public settings, where inexperience, innocence, and youth may lead her to behave in a way that is open to misinterpretation. What she is, something that she intimately knows and tries to reveal in her letters, is not necessarily acknowledged by others, who, judging some of her reactions, bashful silences, and innocent outbursts of laughter, may understand her to be a wholly different person. Instead of being one and the same, a unique and stable person, Evelina seems, therefore, to possess at least two opposite personalities, being “shy and abashed in company, [and] tart and witty in her letters” (Jane Spencer, *Evelina and Cecilia* 28). One might even wonder whether Evelina’s letters really reveal the truth about herself or whether they attempt to display an ideal version of her. If it is so, the contours of her identity remain incomplete if we do not compare it with all the other perspectives about her that are expressed in the novel.

To display multiple perceptions of her main character, Evelina, Burney uses a technique that can be aligned with Bakhtinian heteroglossia.²²² According to this technique, every character’s way of speaking reflects his/her values, personality, or rank and taints his/her perception of people and events. In one key episode in the novel, Burney displays this multifaceted prism in the form of a conversation about Evelina between different men. Each of them expresses in his own language, from his social position and respecting his personal values, how he perceives Evelina. The conversation then reaches Evelina through the reports of a secret witness, her friend Miss Mirvan. At Evelina’s first ball, Miss Mirvan

²²² Heteroglossia is the English translation of the Russian word *raznorečie*, which is also translated sometimes by “speech types.” It refers to what Bakhtin considers as the central characteristic of the novel, that is, its ability to combine a great variety of languages related to different social classes, professions, or individuals into one dialogic unity. See Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, 262-263.

has overheard a conversation about Evelina between three of her admirers, Lord Orville, Mr. Lovel, and a soon-to-be secret suitor, Sir Clement Willoughby. According to Miss Mirvan, the conversation started with Willoughby, who asked Lord Orville, “Why, my Lord, what have you done with your charming partner?” (36) Orville, shrugging and smiling, Miss Mirvan explains, only replied “nothing” (*Evelina* 36), alluding to Evelina’s incapacity to respond to his interrogations and participate in the conversation while they were dancing. To Sir Clement Willoughby’s amazement, reports Miss Mirvan, he admitted that she was “a pretty modest-looking girl” (36) but added that she was also “a poor weak girl” (37), if not “a silent one” (36). Miss Mirvan then assures her friend that when Lovel, furious and piqued by Evelina’s conduct towards him suggested that she was rather ill-bred, Sir Willoughby manifested again his incredulity, maintaining that she “looks all intelligence and expression” (36) and had such “an elegant face” (37). Revengeful, Lovel even accused her of “giving herself such airs” (37), while being merely a “nobody” (37).²²³ Miss Mirvan also reveals that Lord Orville himself thought that her laughter has been offensive to Lovel and suspected her to “have enjoyed his mortification” (37). The reader, who has read Evelina’s report of the evening in her letters and who has had access to her feelings and thoughts, cannot but be utterly surprised at how differently she appeared to others. Sir Clement Willoughby, who will later reveal himself to be a dissipated and unprincipled rake, has seen no faults in Evelina and seems in raptures. His emphatic language and his grandiloquent epithets show his flattering and seductive manners, as well as his lack of principles. Lovel’s aggressive tone and ungenerous remarks about Evelina,

²²³ The term “nobody,” which is used frequently in the novel to describe the ambiguous social status of Evelina may be representative of the way in which women in general were regarded in eighteenth-century British society. On that subject, see Joanne Cutting-Gray, *Woman as Nobody and the Novels of Fanny Burney*.

meanwhile, display his conceitedness and undue pride. Lord Orville's reserved expressions about Evelina and his criticism of some of her reactions reveal, on the contrary, that he is a man of principle who would judge a woman on the basis of her conversation and manners, instead of her looks. Therefore, what this conversation discloses is how one's appearance and conduct in the world may give way to highly different perceptions depending on the perspective adopted. It suggests at the same time that what a person is does not equate with how she appears to others, and that external interpretations of what she is may instill a doubt about the accuracy of her own perception. Since all these interpretations differ significantly, it can be hard for the reader to make sense of this multiplicity and to discern Evelina's true self. Following this conversation, she appears as a heterogeneous kaleidoscope of varied appearances and perceptions, none of them being solely and decidedly the real "her." For one, Evelina is an angel, full of intelligence, sensibility, elegance, and nobility; for another, she is a poor, simple girl, who is a little giddy and foolish; for another, she is ill-bred, gives herself airs, and is, most of all, a nobody. The conversation reported by Miss Mirvan illustrates thus patently the impossibility to really know who a person is, and how different and incompatible the perspectives about someone can be. Influenced by the context, the feelings, and the preconceptions one may have about another, his/her relationship with that other must be clouded by false surmises on his part and might also be thwarted by the other's lack of insight about himself. Through the experiences of Evelina, we may learn how difficult it is for humans to appear clearly to others as what they really are or only think they are. Worse, we may finally discover that humans are, in fact, a mystery even to themselves.

One might remark that it is never Evelina's general essence, as a human, on which other people disagree. Her identity is always understood as something particular to her, as tied to her individuality. In problematizing individuality rather than general essence, Burney differs from modern philosophers, who ignore systematically that contingent and personal aspect of the human subject. For instance, Descartes' confidence in his being a thinking self does not extend to what sort of thinking self he is. The first certitude of his existence and the second one, relative to what he is, a thinking substance, have nothing to do with Descartes taken as an individual. What he says of himself can be attributed to every human. He is "a thing that thinks" (5), that is, "a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wants, refuses, and also imagines and senses" (Descartes 5). Modern philosophy, although subjective, is not individualistic; it remains consistently coherent with its own requirement of universality. The importance given to the individual is rather a romantic feature, a counter-enlightenment movement, which calls for self-articulation and self-manifestation.²²⁴ As Charles Taylor explains, Romanticism supposes that "each individual is different and original" (375) and that we have "to live up to our originality" (375). However, Burney's insistence on individual specificity, if it differs from the universal neutral standpoint of Descartes and Locke, is not perfectly Romantic either. While she attributes great importance to a person's singularity, she does not advocate for self-expression or personal originality. The inner personality of her characters remains always hidden, if possibly repressed, revealed only through intimate letters or involuntary blushes or gestures. The only characters who seem to display self-expression are not sincere and

²²⁴ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 368-390.

are in fact even more repressed than the more reserved ones.²²⁵ Their claim to originality is only a show to hide their simple, ordinary self. We may conclude that what Burney wants to convey with the multiple perspectives from which Evelina's character and identity can be seen and interpreted, is that one's personal identity is obscure and elusive. It may also suggest that the only way to approach it is through a reflection on all these perspectives. Since it is impossible to be aware of all these different perspectives or points of view, such a reflection is only available to the privileged standpoint of the novel reader. As Bakhtin has stated, the novel excels in displaying a multiplicity of speech types, each of them embodying a certain vision of the world and of values that are characteristic of a person's class, profession, or temperament. The novel uses them to distance the reader from his own particular assumptions and from the common way of viewing things.²²⁶ In the case of personal identity, the multiple voices contained in the novel suggest that what one character appears to be or what this character thinks he/she is, may not be the entire truth and the novel can only achieve that demonstration through the use of heteroglossia.

3.7 The Complexity of Personal Identity and the Importance of One's Name

The problem of personal identity can be problematized in Burney's novels in a way even more profound than the process described in the above section. To understand this deeper layer of identity, we must first distinguish two levels of personal identity. The first is determined by one's name and position in the social structure. It is grounded in money, rank, family, and gender. The second is more profound and metaphysical. It refers to the

²²⁵ Interesting examples of these sorts of characters are Sir Sedley Clarendel and Mrs. Arlbery in Burney's third novel, *Camilla*. These two individuals show in public a mixture of eccentricity and effiteness, verging sometimes on impudence, while being in fact good-hearted, generous and able to feel sympathy toward others. Mrs. Arlbery herself admits that everybody plays a role and that none is truly authentic, "We are almost all, my good General, so pitifully plastic, that we act from circumstances, and are fashioned by situations" (Burney, *Camilla* 398).

²²⁶ See chapter one, 76.

inner knowledge of our individual existence and its persistence through time, independently of its social appearance. The first sort of identity can disappear without necessarily driving the second into the dark. On the other hand, one can remain publicly, in the eyes of the world, who he or she is socially, but lose a permanent and conscious knowledge of his or her profound inner self. I will demonstrate how Frances Burney explores in her novel these two levels of personal identity.

According to Locke (and in some respects Descartes), consciousness is required to assert one's existence and constant identity through time. Consequently, humans might find themselves unable to assure their existence and the permanence of their identity if consciousness somehow disappears. Consciousness can be interrupted when one suddenly loses contact with him/herself. This state of alienation can be attained through intense suffering, unbearable social pressure, or intense mental struggles. Frances Burney's novels provide minute analyses of characters who lose contact with themselves, fall into madness, and appear to be, although momentarily, set apart from their former self, as if they were another. The importance that she bestows on social alienation, as a source of one's loss of identity and consciousness, is what distinguishes her from the above philosophers, who only consider the problem of personal identity from a metaphysical point of view. I will analyze Burney's exemplifications of the fragility and loss of one's personal identity through the experiences of the heroines of three of her novels: *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *The Wanderer*.

According to Burney, society can alienate a person's sense of self by questioning his/her name, or more particularly, his/her patronym, and with this, his/her familial

background and social origin.²²⁷ Most of Burney's heroines arrive in the world deprived of such a label, a family name, and thus appear as nobodies, like Juliet and Evelina. At other times, Burney presents women for whom their very name is a burden, impeding their happiness and fulfillment, as is the case with Cecilia.²²⁸ If the deprivation of a name is a problem for everybody, it is even worse for women. As Margaret Doody explains quite directly, "a woman's problematic relation to society is signified by her name, and her name is part of a woman's problem" (6). When young, a woman bears her father's name; when she marries, she takes her husband's. She has no possibility of bestowing a name and a mark of social legitimacy on anyone. If she is deprived of a man's legitimate name, she falls into social degradation and obliteration. Evelina, who has not been recognized by her natural father, has a forged surname, Anville, which, as Julia Epstein remarks,²²⁹ is merely an anagram of her first name. Deprived of family connections, she is for numerous people "a nobody," or someone whose origins are nebulous, and therefore dubious. Society marginalizes her; she can only attain respectability and proper acknowledgment if her father finally accepts her as his daughter, or if she marries Lord Orville. Evelina is

²²⁷ As Margaret Doody has astutely remarked, Burney's own name is sometimes difficult to discern and decipher because it has changed throughout her career. Is she Frances Burney, Frances Burney d'Arbley or Madame d'Arbly? Are we to call her Fanny or Frances, as Margaret Doody strongly advocates for? According to her, the diminutive Fanny instead of Frances has been for a long time an impediment to her public acknowledgment as an important writer. It seems therefore, for Margaret Doody, that Frances Burney's own naming problem echoes the importance that she bestows on that subject through the means of her novel's protagonists, who all encounter a social problem with their names. As she claims, "There is a nice irony in all this ado about her name, for she herself is extremely conscious of the significance of names" (Doody 6).

²²⁸ Cecilia Beverley, the heroine of Burney's second novel, *Cecilia or Memoirs of an Heiress*, cannot inherit the fortune and estate of her late uncle if she changes her name through marriage. Her husband must therefore adopt her name, which might not seem very appealing to some men in the patriarchal society of eighteenth-century Britain. This condition attached to her inheritance is the source of the tragic events that will conduct Cecilia to madness and the loss of her fortune.

²²⁹ Julia Epstein insists on the importance of names in Burney's novels. She observes how Evelina's names are from birth "absurdist constructions"(96), which at the same time bestow and withhold identity. See Epstein 96.

therefore denied a social existence throughout the novel, except for during the last two weeks covered by the narrative, during which time she passes quickly from becoming Miss Belmont to assuming the name of Lady Orville. The rapidity of the transformation from Belmont to Orville is due to the social impropriety of the simultaneous existence of two Miss Belmonts, the title having been bestowed on an impostor for quite some time. For the world, there cannot be two Miss Belmonts; if one rises from her former obscurity, the other must disappear. Evelina cannot be properly labelled Miss Belmont without endangering another woman and depriving her of her former social recognition. The two young women's identities are thus finally secured by their speedy marriage and change of name. In the social world, not only can one not exist without a name, but one name cannot stand properly for two persons. Social identity is tightly corseted to a unique surname; it cannot be shared or distributed among many possessors. However, the uncertainty around social identity and naming is particularly damaging for women, who, by definition, have no patronym of their own, being either the daughter or wife of a man, and having consequently no surname to bestow to a potential heir. Deprived of a father or a husband, they sink utterly into social nothingness.

Throughout the novel, Evelina appears to others by means of her name. At first, under the forged name of Anville, she is an obscure orphan without protection or respectability; later on, as the newly recognized Miss Belmont, she gains an instantaneous and transient social promotion; and finally, under the name of her husband, Lord Orville, she is transformed into a Lady of superior rank. Her name determines who she is socially, and she transforms herself by means of her successive names. The same fate is met by Juliet in Burney's last novel, *The Wanderer*. Her situation is even worse than that of

Evelina. When she appears at the beginning of the novel, she is wholly deprived of *any name* or identity. When someone asks for her name, she remains obdurately silent and refuses to give any. Her refusal to share her name generates suspicion and irritation. Mrs. Marple, one of the novel's most unamiable character, states, "Why does she not say who she is at once? I give nothing to people I know nothing" (29). In *The Wanderer*, the heroine's name is a terrible secret that cannot be revealed without bringing tremendous dangers to herself and others. The author seems to suggest that if a name is indeed a protection in the social world, it can also be a threat, when its divulgence may endanger its possessor or the people she or he loves. Even if Juliet most probably has a name, the fact that she refuses to reveal it equates to her having none. Worse, it throws on her a shadow of disrepute and shame. Who, but a fallen woman, or a disgraced individual, can fear to reveal his or her name?

However, what can be considered even worse than the deprivation of a name is the assumption of a false identity, which entails an attempt to conceal one's proper self under mysterious disguises. Curiously enough, in the case of Juliet, the disguise she chooses is one that degrades, rather than elevates her in the eye of others. To wear the disguise of abjection and forlornness seems the only way for her to escape from her tormentors and persecutors. Obligated to quit France hurriedly, Juliet is forced to disguise herself. She wears rags and patches and colors her skin in black. She has decided to assume the aspect of a poor black woman, one that can be easily identified as a runaway slave, or a refugee from America or the West Indies. She has decided to assume the appearance of the ultimate

outcast.²³⁰ As one of the characters, Mr. Ireton, cruelly explains, “Can such a skin, and such a garb, be worth so much breath?” (29). As some scholars have noted, there was in England at the time considerable fears and anxiety of former slaves from America and Haïti, who had come to live in England, and who were, for the most part, very poor; they were thus often obliged to beg or partake in street entertainment of various sorts to survive.²³¹ The political revolutions in Haïti and in France were also significant causes of anxiety among the upper classes in England and begot important reactionary movements.²³² It is difficult to deny that Frances Burney must have been alluding, through Juliet’s disguise and precipitated departure from France, to the French and Haïtian revolutions and to the miserable situation of black people in England at the time.²³³ However, the blackness of Juliet, being a disguise, soon fades, and she finally reveals herself to be quite the contrary of what she formerly appeared. She is transformed into an educated, accomplished, beautiful, and young white woman. Her English rescuers feel duped and suspect her of treachery. To her deprivation of name is added the deception of disguise. As Tara Czechowski suggests, her first appearance as a poor black woman never

²³⁰ Seemingly, Burney is making a comparison between the precarious social status of women and their instable and fragile identity, and that of runaway slaves. Juliet, the wanderer, is like an errant slave fugitive, an outcast without identity and name, someone who is not regarded as an autonomous subject if she is a subject at all. It echoes Mary Wollstonecraft’s preface to *Maria: or, the Wrongs of Woman* (1798), when she compares the wrongs of woman to “the wrongs of the oppressed part of mankind” (Wollstonecraft 59). In the “oppressed part of mankind,” she includes women, the poor and dominated people from other races. One of her characters, Jemima, is the embodiment of these multiple oppressions, being a poor woman of a seemingly Arabic origin.

²³¹ For an interesting study of Juliet’s disguise in *The Wanderer* and the precarious situation of former slaves in England at the end of the eighteenth century, see Tara Czechowski, “Black, Patched and Pennyless”: Race and Crime in Burney’s *The Wanderer*.”

²³² A leading figure of the English reaction against revolutionary political ideas associated with the French Revolution is Edmund Burke, author of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

²³³ Even if the reference to the Haitian Revolution is never clearly stated in the text, one can affirm, as Shelby Johnson does, that Juliet’s blackface is a patent “trace” in the novel of this historical event. As she explains, the Haitian Revolution is somehow “commemorated in Juliet’s blackface *performance*” (60). See Shelby Johnson, “Reclaiming Memory’s Terra Incognita: Uncovering the Self in Frances Burney’s *The Wanderer*.”

entirely disappears from the mind of her first English companions. To them, however white and educated she becomes, she remains a putative criminal, a thief, both qualities that began to be closely associated with black people at the end of the eighteenth century.²³⁴ Not only does she remain for them suspiciously associated with vagary, beggary, and criminality, but the fact that she has concealed her identity is also, in itself, a sign of a treacherous and adventurous personality. Her transformation from a black fugitive to a well-educated, beautiful young lady is perceived as treachery and as a willful deception. It suggests inauthenticity and falsehood. In eighteenth-century England, to refuse to avow one's name and to disguise oneself as something you are not, served as potent indicators of social ambiguity and ubiquity, two qualities that are opposed to the possession of a clear, truthful, stable social status and identity. The individual who falls into this category is either seen as an "adventurer" (33) or a "wanderer" (33), two terms which denote the absence of a true, authentic social status, of a real place in the social order, and of a fixed abode in the world. Therefore, what Juliet experiences is even worse than Evelina's trials: she is suspected of disguising herself and assuming false identities. Associated with criminality and theft, because of her former black appearance, she is a threat to the social order and must be repudiated from good society.

From here, the figure of the wanderer, which can be associated with the desperate situation of runaway slaves or vagrant black people who were the source of such anxieties in the English imagination at the end of the eighteenth century, is closely associated in Burney's novel with women, who, once deprived of a name and of a recognizable social

²³⁴ As she explains "the assumption of the wanderer's guilt never fades despite the revelation of her lighter skin. Though it soon becomes apparent that Juliet is a well-mannered, white English woman, this does not mean that her racial identity is a *fait accompli*, for she is still affiliated with the black poor in the minds of the elite group in which she finds herself" (Czechowski 680).

status, are obliged to wander alone in the world, without finding any place to dwell, and therefore condemned to a dangerous itinerancy. Banished from place to place, Juliet wanders desperately until she is miraculously rescued and restored to society by the avowal of her real name and position, and by her marriage to Mr. Hartley. Until this timely reversal of fortune, when she finally appears to everyone as the daughter of an English earl, Lord Granville (who was educated abroad for numerous reasons), all she endures from others is contempt, disregard, and banishment. There seems to be no limit to the degrading treatment she must endure. At the peak of her difficulties, when she is helpless, homeless, and without money and protection, she is forced to accept the position of a humble companion at Mrs. Ireton's house. If her situation changes abruptly at the end of the novel, when her noble origin is revealed, this sudden elevation by the grace of a name contrasts greatly with her persistent anonymity throughout most of the novel, in which she is referred to as "the *Incognita*" (12), "the frenchified swindler" (75), "the stranger" (75), and even as a "body" (56). Deprived of a soul, reduced to a mere body, Juliet experiences social nothingness and oblivion. Estranged from society and unrecognized by it, she wanders in an inhospitable world, unable to find any path that is specifically designed for her. The fact that Juliet finally ends up in a forest, where she gets lost and experiences episodes of the utmost horror and dismay, suggests that for Burney, even in nature, there is no refuge for the nameless, friendless, status-deprived human, especially when she is a woman.

While philosophers were very busy finding any means to bridge the gap between the individual subject and the world, without really succeeding, Frances Burney, as a novelist, does not make any attempt of this sort. On the contrary, we are invited, as readers, to experience profoundly, from our *love* for the novel's protagonist and the inhospitality of

the world, our complete alienation from it, without being offered any dogmatic assurance, whether it be God or Reason, of their possible reconciliation.²³⁵ In presenting such a scenario, Burney provides us with what Kundera has termed “*the wisdom of uncertainty*” (6), which constitutes for him “the novel’s wisdom” (7). According to him, modern philosophy has created a separation that it tries vainly to reconcile, offering only unsatisfying and dogmatic attempts to do so. On the contrary, the novel, as a modern literary genre, digs profoundly into the abyss thus created in order to incite us to reflect on it and comprehend its extent and repercussions. However, it cannot succeed in this attempt without resorting to emotion, or without soliciting the heart. The limits of rational demonstration are thus compensated by the literary imagination, which enables the reader to feel the alienation and the estrangement of the novel’s protagonist as if it was his or her own. In doing so, the novel does not provide the reader with solutions, but rather asks them to reflect on their own situation as a modern human living in an age where the world is objectified through the gaze of science, and where they have lost their primary relation to it as a *Lebenswelt*.²³⁶

3.8 A Metaphysical Identity Crisis: Cecilia’s Mental Breakdown

Personal identity, as explored above, is not only social and attached to a name; it is also tied to something non-empirical, that is, to the inner certitude of one’s persistence

²³⁵ I use the word *love* to refer to Martha Nussbaum’s claim, in *Love’s Knowledge*, that we can gain knowledge about human life through novels by means of the emotions we feel toward the characters that we love. As discussed in Chapter One, 79-80, certain truths cannot be grasped through philosophical demonstrations and rational proof, but only through our sympathy for the characters we encounter in works of literary fiction.

²³⁶ Edmund Husserl coined the concept of *Lebenswelt* or “lifeworld” in one of his late works, *The Crisis of the European Sciences*. In it, he explains that before any theorization and mathematical understanding of our world can arise, humans already understand their world as the one in which they live and share with others. The horizon of this living world is what guides all their thoughts and actions. Unfortunately, theoretical abstractions have tended to cut humans off from their more genuine relation to the world so that they now feel alienated from it. See Husserl, *The Crisis of European Science*, 142.

through time as the same self. However, the inner knowledge of being one and the same subject through time can also be threatened, interrupted, shattered, and dispersed, especially when someone loses temporarily or permanently his or her consciousness and sanity. A mental crisis occasioned by intense suffering can bring about a temporary interruption of the flux of consciousness. While two important heroines in Burney's novels undergo such a process of self-annihilation and temporary absence, namely Cecilia and Camilla, the most detailed and tragic episode is recounted in Burney's second novel, *Cecilia; or Memoirs of an Heiress*. To understand how Burney uses Cecilia's breakdown to question and explore the philosophical question of personal identity, we must briefly recall Locke's position on this matter. As discussed above, personal identity is for Locke based on consciousness and attached mainly to the soul, even if the consciousness to possess a body of a particular sort is part of one's identity. If what he calls the "man" can remain the same, even if he has lost consciousness— primarily because he has not physically changed —the "person" can cease to exist and to partake of the same identity if its consciousness disappears.

As a philosopher preoccupied with these problems, Locke formulated strange thought experiments about personal identity. For example, he described the migration of Castor's consciousness during his sleeping state in Pollux's body. From this imaginary situation, he concludes that the same person can inhabit two different bodies and that, consequently, personal identity does not depend on "the soul's being united to the very same numerical particles of matter" (37). For him, consciousness relates to the soul, and it can exist in different bodies. Frances Burney, for her part, exemplifies in her novels the same problems, but with a more tragic and compelling turn. As Catherine Z. Elgin has

stated, philosophical thought experiments remain abstract and “austere” (48). Literary thought experiments, on the contrary, “can presuppose and provide thick descriptions of events, agents and circumstances” (49). They can use many factors, such as plot and character, to achieve their ends. They can also resort to different “perspectives on events” (49) and evoke deeper meanings by using tone, as well as “sound and shape” (39). My claim is that Burney uses resources of exemplification to provide the reader with dense thought experiments in which the disappearance of consciousness and the loss of one’s identity possesses all the concreteness and detailed embodiment of a “real life” experience. She goes much further than Locke by venturing more concretely and deeply into the complexity of one’s personal identity crisis. In doing so, she reveals some features of consciousness that escape Locke’s notice.

Before analyzing the mental breakdown of Burney second novel’s protagonist, Cecilia, and her subsequent loss of personal identity, it is necessary to provide a summary of who she is, and of the reasons that might have induced her fall into madness. Cecilia is a young orphan, who is supposed to inherit a considerable fortune from her deceased parents and uncle, when she comes of age. However, her late uncle’s fortune cannot be hers if she fails to observe one important condition: her husband, upon their marriage, must relinquish his surname to adopt hers. This situation is the origin of all her miseries, because the man she loves, Mortimer Delvile, is the only one whose family will never accept a change of name. The Delviles are an extremely proud family; they are not rich, but they take pride in their old name, pedigree, and castle. As Burney demonstrates in *Evelina* and *The Wanderer*, the name is for an individual or his family of tremendous social importance. If one would normally expect a woman to change hers when she marries, many people

would strongly object to the idea of a man doing the same. A tragedy of naming seems again to lie at the core of this novel, where a kind, intelligent and rich woman resigns everything — name and fortune, pride, and ambition — to become Mrs. Delvile and satisfy the unreasonable conditions of her lover's family. However, the tragedy goes far beyond the social problem of names and touches the roots of personal identity. The blessed heiress, who was beautiful, intelligent, and virtuous, and who intended to use her money to help the poor and helpless, the woman who others look up to with envy, undergoes a future radical transformation. Rich, full of hope and plans for projects, and beautiful and admired, she loses her money, relinquishes her most important projects, and is reduced to wander, disheveled and haggard, in the streets of London. Having married her lover, Mortimer Delvile, she is forced to renounce all her uncle's fortune. She is tragically deprived of all her superior means and her ambitions to help the poor and stripped of the possibility of living independently and striving to improve society. Moreover, the one to whom she has sacrificed everything and married in secret leaves her temporarily to nurse his mother. When he resurfaces, he engages himself in what seems to be two horrible duels. Having lost everything, including her money and her house, Cecilia now faces the possibility to lose her husband in a horrific duel. Afraid that Mortimer might be having a duel with Mr. Belfield, out of mere unfounded jealousy, and willing to find him and stop the proceedings, she roams, alone, without money, nor friends, in London, completely destitute and gradually losing what remains of her reason. This moment in the novel constitutes the climax of Cecilia's fate, the moment where everything converges to destroy her, to annul her existence and her identity. It forms, undoubtedly, for the reader, a cathartic moment, when through fear and pain for Cecilia, he or she comes to the knowledge of the fragility

and instability of one's identity.²³⁷ Burney uses Aristotelian catharsis to induce in the readers feelings of pity and pain for Cecilia. In this way, they can accede to epistemic insights into the very nature of personal identity.

The novel describes the progression of Cecilia's delirium. Her fear for Delvile's fate grows more and more prominent and effaces all other considerations. Wandering through the streets of London, she fancies him "bleeding by the arm of Belfield" (Burney, *Cecilia* 897), and this image soon takes "full possession of her senses" (807). Obsessed by one fixed idea, she is careless of everything else, and she flies through the city at a "supernatural speed" (807), without "consciousness of any plan" (897), "darting forward where-ever there was more room and turning back when she met with any obstruction" (897). Already degraded to the level of a remote-controlled object, manifesting unhuman speed, she finally loses all consciousness of who she is and where she comes from. Fatigued and exhausted, and unable to keep running, Cecilia enters a random shop, where "breathless and panting" (897), like some wild animal, she sinks "upon the floor" (897) with "a look disconsolate and helpless" (897), "without speaking" (897). The people in the shop immediately identify her as a mad woman, just "broke loose from Bedlam" (897). Hoping for a reward from her caretakers, the owner of the shop, Mrs. Myers, undertakes to lock Cecilia in a room, before she starts to move again in search of Mortimer Delvile. Cecilia sleeps there for some time, but when she wakes and recovers her memory, that is, her consciousness of who she is and what she has done, Cecilia finds herself alone in a

²³⁷ According to Stanley Cavell, it is through our acknowledgment of the sufferings of concrete fictional characters that we are able to complete our understanding of what human emotions are. See Chapter Two 112-115. It is also through this means, that we become aware of the fragility of personal identity. This sort of emotional and empathic understanding can also be related to Martha Nussbaum's epistemic interpretation of Aristotle's *catharsis*, according to which the fear and pain we feel for Cecilia may help us to understand how precarious her identity is. See Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 390-400.

room unknown to her, unable to recall how she got there and where she might be, because of this temporary collapse of her consciousness. She screams and tries to escape but discovers that the door is locked and that nobody seems to care. Fatigued by her exertions and screaming, she finally loses what remains of her reason. She starts raving and talking to herself about anxious and fearful subjects, wandering from one thought to another, her mind controlled by her own “terrified and disordered imagination” (901). At this stage of her personal dissolution, Cecilia is not only deprived of the consciousness, memory, and knowledge of what she is; she is also unable to think consistently. She raves in her own imagination, far from the real world, and she displays a behavior that is radically opposed to her usual disposition of character, which is “silent and quiet” (901).

Cecilia’s breakdown represents Burney’s literary exploration of the problem of personal identity and of the stability and consistency of the self. Cecilia’s descent into madness illustrates concretely what philosophers such as Locke define only abstractly. Of course, Burney agrees with Locke’s assertion that personal identity is grounded in consciousness. However, she shows her adherence to this thesis through Cecilia’s personal tragic fate. She illustrates, in a particular narrative, how madness, depriving Cecilia of consciousness, leaves her ignorant of who she is and transforms her entire personality. She also suggests, through the specific case of Cecilia’s madness, that the loss of personal identity comes with the decline of reason, reinforcing Descartes’s idea that humans are essentially thinking substances. Moreover, she attributes Cecilia’s madness and loss of identity to the predominance, in her mind, of the imagination. She even suggests that such a collapse of the self induces animalistic behavior. She makes these claims without providing any discursive demonstration; rather, she uses a narrative relating the concrete

experience of a female character who undergoes a terrible moment of mental collapse. As readers, we learn from Cecilia's experience that the loss of personal identity can be equated with an alienation from reason, an escape into unbridled imagination, and descent into a state of animality.

My claim is that it is through the experience of madness, experienced by a fictional character in a fictitious narrative such as a novel, that we can learn what personal identity really is. Burney suggests that losing one's identity through sleep or drunkenness, as evoked by Locke, is not a radical experience but one that remains transient and insignificant compared to madness. Moreover, the possibility of madness lurks behind every sensible and proper life; it can transform an angel like Cecilia into a raving, disheveled and restless creature. Contrary to Descartes and Locke, who do not take madness seriously,²³⁸ Frances Burney places the emphasis on the capital importance of this total breakdown of reason to provide an explanation of what personal identity really is. To put it differently, what she suggests is that one cannot grasp the real meaning of self-annihilation without experiencing, through the means of the literary imagination, the most radical form that it can assume: madness. By the representation of such mental collapse, Burney's novel plays a necessary role in the completion of her paradigm of what identity is and how it can be lost. As Cavell would likely have remarked, in beholding Cecilia's tragic fate, we do not simply know what personal identity is; we *acknowledge* it. Personal identity remains abstract—nothing but an empty category—until it reaches the state of a concrete

²³⁸ In his first *Meditation*, Descartes explicitly refuses to consider the case of the fool as relevant to the determination of the reality of one's perception of oneself. As he writes, "Mais quoi! Ce sont des fous et je ne serais pas moins extravagant si je me rég;ais sur leur exemple" (Descartes, *Méditations métaphysiques*). Locke, for his part, suggests that every person who adheres strongly to wrong association of ideas is a fool, which makes madness a very common thing. See Locke 173.

embodiment in a work of literary imagination. Caring for Cecilia, imagining her sufferings and situation, allow us to acknowledge her tragic experience and, by this means, to understand more completely what personal identity is.

However, if, as Catherine Z. Elgin has suggested, literary works are thought experiments, the singular case of Cecilia must bring to the fore some features of personal identity that might have been overlooked by philosophers. Locke's position about personal identity assumes that what constitutes the self relies purely on the soul and has nothing to do with the body. As we have seen earlier, he goes so far as to suggest the possibility that a soul could migrate into another body and retain the same identity. The two major founders of the modern conception of the self, Descartes, and Locke, both claim that personal identity, based on consciousness, is a property of the soul, which is immaterial and simple.²³⁹ Therefore, it cannot be affected by the disintegration or alteration of the body and cannot discompose itself into separate parts. Since the body, which is material and composed of parts that change through time, does not constitute a person's identity, it can change without affecting personal identity. As Locke confidently asserts, "nobody will make identity of persons, to consist in the soul's being united to the very same particles of matter: for if that be necessary for identity, t'will be impossible, in that constant flux of the

²³⁹ In his second *Meditation*, Descartes clearly asserts that the discovery of our existence is made through a thinking process and does not depend on the body. He remarks, "j'ai déjà nié que j'eusse aucun sens ni aucun corps. J'hésite néanmoins, car que s'ensuit-il de là? Suis-je tellement dépendant du corps et des sens, que je ne puisse être sans eux? Mais je me persuadé qu'il n'y avait rien du tout dans le monde, qu'il n'y avait aucun ciel, aucune terre, aucuns esprits ni aucuns corps; ne me suis-je donc pas aussi persuadé que je n'étais point? Non, certes, j'étais sans doute, si je me suis persuadé, ou seulement si j'ai pensé quelque chose" (79). For his part, Locke makes it very clear that consciousness does not depend on something material, but rather on what he calls an "immaterial substance" or a soul. See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 146-149

particles of our bodies, that any man should be the same person, two days, or two moments together” (37-38).

However close to Descartes’ and Locke’s conception of personal identity, Burney differs from them regarding the relationship between body and mind. She reveals this difference in her minute description of the progressive fall of Cecilia into madness. Cecilia’s progressive loss of identity and consciousness appears to be tied to bodily manifestations in a way that obviate any possibility to envisage them separately. We are told that she gains supernatural speed, that she is fatigued and exhausted, that her complexion is changed, that her eyes and air are infused with “wildness” (905). She wrings her hands, “refuses all sustenance” (900), and is in a “high fever” (900). All these physical alterations attest to the impossibility of truly separating the soul from the body. Cecilia’s crisis of mind is also a bodily crisis. When consciousness fails to sustain itself, its collapse translates into bodily manifestations. Moreover, it is through her physical alterations that Cecilia’s madness and loss of reason are first revealed in the novel. Her wild and contradictory ravings only testify to what her physical appearance has already shown. When Albany comes into Cecilia’s room, he does not recognize her at first because of her physical appearance. He sees a woman whose dress is in “much disorder” (902), and whose fine hair is “disheveled” (902); he beholds that the feathers of her hat are “broken and half falling down” (902). He has to come closer to finally recognize her. Still, it seems to him impossible that the same person could really inhabit that altered body. Skeptical, he exclaims, “is *This* Cecilia!” (902). Contrary to Locke, Burney seems to imply that the “man” or “woman” is not opposed to the “person,” because when consciousness is

temporarily extinguished, the body is transformed by its absence, and does not appear the same as before. It is profoundly altered.

Another difference that one might identify between Burney's literary representation of Cecilia's loss of consciousness and Locke's theory of personal identity concerns the gradual process of this loss. The novel presents the deterioration of Cecilia's soul as gradual, as if the soul, like the body, was a combination of parts, each of them falling successively into darkness. Instead of being one single and simple substance, Burney seems to indicate that the self is made of many components and is therefore a compound. Yet, she is not denying that something like personal identity exists, as David Hume did when he conceived the self as nothing but a "bundle or collection of different perceptions" (*Treatise* 134). The composed nature of the self and its close interaction with the body does not deny its existence and identity through time; rather, it indicates that the existence and continuing endurance of the self is at each moment felt and thought in each part of our body and mind, both mingling in a way that obviate any possible separation. The loss of consciousness and of one's own identity is therefore an event that concerns soul and body alike.

Even if Burney seems to be averse to some of the most radical forms of empiricism, namely the materialism of French philosophers such as La Mettrie, mostly because they deny the immortality of the soul, as it is clearly indicated in theological discussions occurring in *The Wanderer*,²⁴⁰ she nevertheless points towards a conception of the self that

²⁴⁰ In *The Wanderer*, there is a well-known theological conversation between Elinor Joddrel, a decided materialist who does not believe in the immortality of the soul, and Harleigh, who strongly believes that the soul is immaterial and immortal. He tries to convince her of his beliefs and to renounce her suicidal attempts. The author seems to favor Harleigh's and Juliet's positions regarding the immortality of the soul against that of Elinor, who is presented as a wild and dangerous person, corrupted by false materialist assumptions. See Frances Burney, *The Wanderer*, 782-78.

unites rather than separates body and soul. We have seen how the mental degradation of Cecilia has induced gradual transformations in her body. What the novel also indicates is that physical alterations may lead to a change in personality. In two instances, the novel refers to Cecilia's total change of personality. Before, she was of "a quiet and calm disposition" (903); now she enters into raving fits. Before, she was pliable and supple; now she shows "a stubbornness wholly foreign to her genuine character" (904). Of course, such a change can be attributed, as Locke would have suggested, to the dissipation of the consciousness she had of her previous self and its replacement by a new one that is completely unaware of the precedent. However, when Locke distinguishes "the sleeping man" (145) from "the walking man" (145), or "the drunken person" (145) from "the sober one" (145), does he not implicitly agree that their change of identity is due to a body alteration? Therefore, are we not meant to see madness in this light, that is, as being also a material phenomenon? This is, undoubtedly, what Cecilia's experience tends to suggest. Cecilia's total change of personality is not only an immaterial phenomenon, but also a material one, occurring in the brain. We may therefore surmise that, under considerable pressure and tension due to her anxiety, something has occurred in Cecilia's brain, which has induced the change of identity previously mentioned. The novel seems to point in that direction when the author describes Cecilia's gradual loss of identity and reason as the result of an attack of external factors such as horror, hurry, confusion, heat and fatigue, which are "too strong for her fears, feelings, and faculties" (896). She is therefore "wholly overpowered" (896). Her senses are "wholly disordered" (896) and the idea of Delvile's danger takes "sole possession of her brain" (896). These passages illustrate how sentiments of confusion, horror, hurry, joined with bodily fatigue and bodily heat affect the mind of

Cecilia and threaten to destroy its previous equilibrium. Emotions and bodily factors such as fatigue and heat, are envisaged as intertwined causes for the deterioration of her personal identity. The repetition of the adverb “wholly” before the adjective “overpowered” and “disordered” suggests that what Cecilia is, *must be* understood as a whole, that is, as the constant interaction of both body and soul. Moreover, we are told that a fixed idea has taken possession of her brain, as if ideas, which are related to the soul, were somehow deposited in the brain, and possess a material ground. All these descriptions seem to hint toward a comprehension of personal identity, which combines both body and mind, and thoughts and emotions in a play of reciprocal causation.

These reciprocal relations of causality between consciousness and the body were studied and analyzed minutely by eighteenth-century materialist French philosophers such as La Mettrie. Such philosophers were ardent supporters of mechanism as the only reasonable explanation for phenomenon related to the human body and mind. For La Mettrie, who defends mechanism and the materiality of the soul, man is indeed a very complex machine in which body and soul are tied together by multiple reciprocal relations of causation. He argues that the soul’s various states are always connected with the body. Identified with the brain, the soul can cause bodily manifestations, even when the bodily part has been amputated. Conversely, the body can cause a disease of the mind, such as hysteria or hypochondria, and even produce mental virtues, such as courage. It is also clear for him that what distinguishes an idiot or a lunatic, from a sensible human depends on the consistency of his brain.²⁴¹ If Frances Burney likely did not share this radical empiricist

²⁴¹ For La Mettrie, any deficiency in learning abilities or in judgment takes its roots in the brain: “Si l’imbécile ne manque pas de cerveau, comme on le remarque ordinairement, ce viscère péchera par une mauvaise consistance, par trop de mollesse, par exemple. Il en est de même des fous” (La Mettrie 158).

view and probably did not envisage the soul to be merely an organic part of the body like the brain, she presented mind and body as closely related and as difficult to separate. Her position was probably influenced by the contemporaneous culture of sensibility, which dominated British culture and literature in the mid eighteenth century, and which advocated for close relations between mind and body.²⁴² Analyzing minutely the relationships between body and mind, and how they interact together in the play of sensations, emotions, and thoughts, she provides what La Mettrie would have termed “empirical evidence” of their interaction, even if the person who manifests these emotions and who undergoes bodily manifestations related to it is a fictional character in a constructed narrative.

We can therefore conclude that Frances Burney uses the novel as any empiricist philosopher would have done, that is, as an experiment in which she observes, analyzes, and describes human phenomena that she had previously selected, organized, and isolated.

²⁴² Sensibility is a cultural movement that arose around the middle of the eighteenth century and that influenced literature and mores significantly. It is characterized by the belief that some people were more able than others to be moved and touched by the sufferings of others through sympathy. People that possessed sensibility would easily faint, blush or cry when confronted to other’s sufferings, showing that their soul and their body interact constantly in response to their environment. For more on this cultural phenomenon, see G.J Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*; John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*; Janet Todd, *Sensibility. An Introduction*. The influence of the culture of sensibility on Frances Burney’s thought is also widely acknowledged by scholars. Some of them work more precisely in the field of disability studies and focus on the correlation drawn between disabled bodies and moral superiority in eighteenth-century culture. See Jason S. Farr, “Sharp Minds/Twisted Bodies: Intellect, Disability, and Female Education in Frances Burney’s *Camilla*”; Helen Deutsch, *Loving Dr. Johnson*; Katherine Mary Skipsey, “Eloquent Bodies: Disability and Sensibility in the novels of Frances Burney and Jane Austen.” However, disabilities in the eighteenth-century were not always seen as belonging only to the body. They could also be related to the mind. In the case of Cecilia, it is her mind that is disabled, because it is too responsive to the feelings of others. In this period, this excess of sensibility was often imputed to the nerves. As some scholars have argued, the culture of sensibility had in the eighteenth-century a medical foundation in the theories of the nerves. Someone who, like Cecilia, had nerves too delicate or too responsive to others’ pain and demands, could be temporarily destroyed mentally by the pressures that other people’s feelings exerted on his/her nerves. Therefore, it can be said that Cecilia’s mind suffers from an excess of sympathy for others, due to her “delicate” nervous system. Even if this delicacy is a disability which can lead her to temporary madness, it is also a sign of a moral superiority. Regarding nerves’ theory and the culture of sensibility, see George Rousseau, “Nerves, Spirit and Fibers: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility”; John Mullan, “Hypochondria and Hysteria: Sensibility and the Physicians”; John Dussinger, *The Disease of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century Fiction*. On nerves’ theory and Frances Burney’s novels, see: Eleanor C.L. Crouch, “Nerve Theory and Sensibility: Delicacy in the Work of Frances Burney.”

In doing so, she really is, as she claimed, investigating the human heart, but through literary means, providing the reader with literary experiments that have the power to reveal more concretely and intimately what it is to be a human being in an estranged world. The alienation of the modern subject is rendered more acute and poignant by being expressed through the voice of a female protagonist, women being undoubtedly at this time, in Europe, the incarnation of otherness and alienation and the more precarious members of society. However, Burney not only illustrates in her novels the alienation of the modern subject; she also offers a way to overcome the gap between the subject, the world, and others, notably through aesthetic representation, and refined thought experiments. These literary devices bring about cathartic moments, where the emotions and the love we feel for the characters direct us toward an acknowledgement of others and the world.

Chapter Four

The Expansion of the Subject Through Nature and the Ecstatic Experience of the Sublime in Ann Radcliffe's Novels

4.1 Ann Radcliffe's Gothic Romances and the Liberation of the Self

If Frances Burney's heroines are rather unhappy when they first enter a world into which they feel ignored, isolated, and alienated, Ann Radcliffe's heroines undergo a more terrific experience. The oppression, and the threats and dangers, that surround them, are inflated to a degree that is practically fantastical, producing peeks of fear and terror not attained in Burney's novels. The male characters, who, in Radcliffe's novels, try to rape, sequester, or even kill the unfortunate heroines, are no ordinary rakes or profligates; they are ignominious monsters. The nightmarish environment created in many parts of Radcliffe's novels instils a gloomy and heavy atmosphere that employs supernatural language and places these novels in the fantastic realm of *Gothic romance*. My claim is that Ann Radcliffe's perception of the world and of the dangers it contains for the self — notably the female self— could not have been represented more adequately than through the mediation of the specific form of the gothic. Through this form and its *cathartic effect* on the reader, together with the use of picturesque landscapes represented as *sublime*, Ann Radcliffe is able to express, in the most accurate manner, her dramatic vision of the world, while suggesting at the same time means of liberation for the oppressed self through an extension of its powers beyond the limitations of an enclosed subjectivity.

Imagining ways by which the terrorized and miserable human subject can liberate itself from oppression, Ann Radcliffe, moreover, uses all the characteristic features of the Gothic to engage with the most important philosophical problems of the Enlightenment. Writing during the 1790s, a decade immersed in upheavals engendered by the French Revolution, Radcliffe is concerned with questions of political institutions and individual freedom. Influenced by the writings of Rousseau, she also ponders the obstacles that

reason and civilization can oppose to the self-realization of the individual. Wary of superstitions, like all Enlightenment philosophers, and dubious about imagined terrors that could dominate the mind and incapacitate its rational actions, she remains nevertheless a strong supporter of imagination and sensibility, which can both emancipate the self from violent authorities. While she might appear as a proto-Romantic thinker, notably due to her close connection with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thoughts regarding the evils of refined and sophisticated civilization and the valorization of the simplicity of nature,²⁴³ she did not dismiss rationality and culture entirely. On the contrary, in her novels, she advocates for a rational explanation of fantastic occurrences and for a rational control of one's excessive sentimentality.²⁴⁴ While she displays distrust towards civilization and its luxuries, she praises intelligent and sensible conversation between equals, and the enchantment provided by poetry and music. Ultimately, she seems to point toward an ideal aesthetic community based on a common susceptibility to beauty and sublimity in nature and in the arts, and on the action of sharing and communicating with others one's sentiments and aesthetic predilections. This aesthetic community of shared tastes and values possesses a political

²⁴³ Rousseau argues that the progress of civilization and knowledge has brought only misery to humans and that it has made them lose the equality, freedom, and moral goodness they enjoyed in a state of nature. Human desires have developed at an incessant speed and to satisfy all their artificial needs, humans must use all the resources of their understanding and all their talents to secure what they need at the expense of others. Some people will succeed and others not and the ones who fail must become the slaves of the others, who will dominate them by their knowledge, power, and money. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'ingalité parmi les hommes*. Rousseau's position regarding the superiority of natural life against a cultivated and socialized one is summarized clearly in this affirmation, "Or je voudrais bien qu'on m'expliquât quel peut être le genre de misère d'un être libre, dont le coeur est en paix, et le corps en santé" (92). He confirms his point of view a few lines later, asking, "Je demande si jamais on a ouï dire qu'un Sauvage en liberté ait seulement songé à se plaindre de la vie et à se donner la mort?" (92).

²⁴⁴ Contrary to Horace Walpole and other Gothic writers, Ann Radcliffe, following Clara Reeve's *Old English Baron*, was known for her rational explanations of supernatural phenomenon. Sir Walter Scott, in *The Lives of Novelists*, deplored this rational tendency that he imputes to Radcliffe, "A principal characteristic of Mrs. Radcliffe's romances is the rule which the author imposed upon herself, that all the circumstances of her narrative, however mysterious, and apparently superhuman, were to be accounted for on natural principles at the winding up of the story." See Walter Scott, *Lives of Novelists*, 326-327. On Radcliffe's "explained supernatural," see Rictor Norton, *Gothic Reading. The First Wave: 1764-1740*, 51 and E.J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, 106.

dimension, one that is already present in Kant's aesthetic theory but in a more *concrete* and *persuasive* manner.²⁴⁵ However, what may constitute her notable contribution to the philosophical discussions of the 1790s resides in the power she bestows on the imagination, conceived as the source of the aesthetic emotions of the sublime and the beautiful, and in the importance that she gives to aesthetic experience in general as a site of reconciliation between the subject and the world.

Ann Radcliffe's use, in her novels, of the aesthetic emotions of the sublime and the beautiful, especially in relation to Edmund Burke's aesthetic theory, are a well-known topic in literary studies. Her mitigated reaction to the French revolution and the political values it carried, as well as her endorsement of Rousseau's perspective about the State and the corruptness of refined civilization have also been commented upon. She has been presented as politically and socially conservative by some, and revolutionary by others.²⁴⁶ However,

²⁴⁵ In chapter two, I present the Kantian concept of *sensus communis*, conceived as the foundation of all judgments of taste. The universal claim attached to these sorts of judgments, however subjective, was made possible by the supposition of a common way of feeling and thinking among humans. In saying that something is beautiful, the human subject considers the mode of thinking of all others and solicits their accord. Thus, aesthetic judgments open an intersubjective space of free communication and discussion. For Kant, aesthetic judgments do not express a unique perspective, but they tend to include those of others, who possess the same common sense and who can be persuaded and convinced. See Chapter two, 21-22. For her part, Hannah Arendt pointed judiciously to the political implications of *sensus communis* in Kant's aesthetic philosophy, when she observed that to communicate our thoughts to others through language and to court their agreement by persuasion, is a basic political activity, one that would be impossible without *sensus communis*, that is, without a common way of thinking and judging, belonging to humans and enabling them to communicate their thoughts and feelings to others and to be understood. According to Arendt, aesthetic emotions and judgments are therefore political; they presuppose the existence of a human community, to which we communicate our thoughts and feelings, while considering what the members of this community may think on the same matters. For her, "judgment, and especially judgments of taste, always reflects upon others and their taste, takes their possible judgments into account. This is necessary because I am human and cannot live outside the company of men" (*Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* 71).

²⁴⁶ Among the most important works on Radcliffe's life and works, one can find Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe. The Great Enchantress*; Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho, The Life of Ann Radcliffe*; and Dale Townsend(ed), *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*. Important journal articles and monographs deal more specifically with her relationships with philosophers such as Burke or Rousseau, such as JoEllen DeLucia, *From the Female Gothic to a Feminist Theory of History: Ann Radcliffe and the Scottish Enlightenment*; Kirstin M. Gerten; "Sublime luxuries" of the Gothic Edifice: Immersive Aesthetics and Kantian Freedom in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe"; Zak Watson, "The Supernatural Subject of the Sublime in Burke and Radcliffe: A Reading of the *Mysteries of Udolpho*"; James Watt, "*Ann Radcliffe and Politics*."

scholarly works on these topics remain limited as to their philosophical scope. They do not tackle the underlying metaphysical and ontological assumptions on which Radcliffe's interest for Rousseau and Burke rely. Moreover, her use of aesthetic emotions are never envisaged by critics as part of a personal response to the difficulties stemming from the position of the modern self. It is, therefore, in situating her work in the context of the epistemic and ontological difficulties brought about by the prominence and the isolation of the modern subject, that I intend to bring a new light on her work and mark her significant contribution to eighteenth-century philosophical thought. Therefore, I intend to demonstrate that, for Radcliffe, imagination and aesthetic sensibility can help the self to overcome fear and terror, and to join an aesthetic community of equals. For her, the aesthetic imagination also allows humans to go beyond their subjective limits and to merge with the world, if not with the whole universe.

4.2. Romance and the Gothic: Its Political Implications and Its Critique of the Enlightenment

Ann Radcliffe was recognized in her time as the “the great enchantress”²⁴⁷ and as the founder of the Gothic genre, even though it was Horace Walpole, with *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), who truly invented that literary tradition. She was considered as a master and a leader of the genre because she had, somehow, renovated it and perfected it. According to Walter Scott, “She led the way in a peculiar style of composition, affecting

Important debates relating to Radcliffe's presumed conservatism in politics are discussed in the following articles: Mary Poovey, “Ideology and the *Mysteries of Udolpho*”; David Durant, “Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic”; and Kim Ian Michasiw, “Ann Radcliffe and the Terrors of Powers.”

²⁴⁷ Thomas de Quincey first labelled Ann Radcliffe “the great Enchantress,” a qualification that is still associated with her, and to which the title of Robert Miles's book bears testimony: *Ann Radcliffe. The Great Enchantress*. For his part, Walter Scott describes her as “a mighty magician,” as if supernatural elements lay not only in the content of her novels, but also in her talents to evoke the fantastic appearances and instill fear and awe. See Walter Scott, *Sir Walter Scott on Novelsists and Fiction*, 105. According to Robert Miles, eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century critics also aligned her power of enchantment with “her poetic sensibility, her pictorial, scenic art, or her ability to duplicate a sense of the supernatural” (Miles 11).

powerfully the mind of the reader” (Scott qtd. in Miles 11). She was also the most popular of Gothic novelists.²⁴⁸ Gothic romances became very popular in the last decades of the eighteenth century, when several women writers followed Radcliffe’s and Clara Reeves’ examples and tried to write their own Gothic novels. This “terrorist school” was perceived ambivalently, in part because of the poor reputation of novels in general, compared to poetry and drama, but also because of the unrealistic and supernatural elements that gothic novels contain, by which they seem to belong to the obsolete tradition of romances. Until the 1780s, romances were considered in general, according to the Enlightenment belief in the progress of reason and its condemnation of superstition and unrealistic credence, as regressive and attached to the past. They were also seen as fantastical and remote from any relation to real persons or situations, and thus remote from what could probably happen in real life.²⁴⁹ Conversely, novels were seen as a modern genre, compared to which medieval romances were regarded contemptuously as a vestige of an obscure past. However, with the introduction of Gothic romances, this ancient genre was renovated, and its sudden popularity testified to a change of mentality in the public regarding the form of romances and about the Middle-Ages. The characteristic Enlightenment confidence in the progress of reason through history and in the capital importance of rationality was somewhat challenged, notably in the wake of the French revolution. People began to wonder if the medieval past was not, after all, endowed with some qualities that had been lost in the

²⁴⁸ According to Brian Miles, “She was a huge, Europe-wide success” (Miles 8). He compares her popular success with modern day best-selling writers such as Barbara Cartland.

²⁴⁹ James Beattie was skeptical about the value of romances, which he found “a dangerous recreation” (573) since most of them were “unskillfully written, and tend[ed] to corrupt the heart” (573-74). This opinion about romances reflects what most people thought about romances and novels in the early to mid-eighteenth century. Old romances were seen as using “lofty and elevated language”, and as describing things that “never happened,” whereas modern novels were regarded as “a picture of real life and manners” (Reeve qtd in Miles 37).

modern, so-called ‘enlightened’ age. This past age appeared to some as a simpler age, untouched by the modern division of reason and sentiment, feeling and thought, nature and culture. What is described in the previous chapter as the “modern predicament,” the separation of the mind and the world, reason and emotion, the intellect, and the heart, seems to have nourished the gothic impulse toward a past unity that should be revived. However, gothic novels remain deeply informed by Enlightenment thought, retaining the superiority of reason over irrational superstition, while aiming at the same time to show the importance of feelings and emotions and the necessity to see beyond empirical evidence. “Reveries,” dreams, ghosts, and apparitions abound in these fictions and testify to a human tendency to believe in spiritual and immaterial realities. If, for Radcliffe and some other Gothic novelists, a rational explanation is necessary, their imaginary characters attest to something important and real, which is rooted in our deepest fears and dearest hopes. As we will see, for Radcliffe, this human tendency toward the supernatural shows the power of the imagination to create figures that people believed in, to reconfigure the world as it pleases, to torment the mind with imaginary terrors, and to concentrate in symbolic creations deep truths about human life.

It may be said, though, that the Gothic genre is formulaic and repetitive, that it is characterized by codified and predictable tales, and that it is sometimes a little absurd and without significant literary value.²⁵⁰ It surely sometimes relies on an easy recipe. On the other hand, it can also be said that, within the boundaries of its strict delimitation of

²⁵⁰ Robert Miles explains that the ambivalence about the value of Ann Radcliffe’s works lies in part in their “transparently formulaic” form combined with their “own typical ingredients”: castles, corridors and dungeons, distressed maiden, villains, sublime landscapes, specters, bodies, banditti, etc. See Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe. The Great Enchantress*, 2-3. For her part, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick readily admits that “no other literary form as influential as the Gothic novel has been perceived as being as equally pervasively conventional. Once you know that a novel is of the Gothic genre you can predict its content with an unnerving certainty” (Sedgwick 9).

features, the Gothic nevertheless offers a great variety of possibilities, and that its significant posterity signals that the fears it awakes reveal something profound concerning modern Western thought. Moreover, considering that British women novelists wrote a great number of Gothic novels at the end of the eighteenth century, this important female contribution to the Gothic may suggest that there was some sort of affinity between the Gothic and women.²⁵¹ The dreadful aspects of individualism and utilitarianism, as products of an enlightened age, the patriarchal structure of power that was no longer tempered by an ancient respect and reverence for women, and the oppression and violence created by the new capitalist appetite for money, might have been felt more acutely by women. Because of the massive implication of female writers in the Gothic genre and of the prominent place that female heroines take in these novels, Ellen Moers has famously argued that the Gothic was a typically female genre, which opened a new canon in literary history, one that she calls “the female gothic.”²⁵² If this label has since been used to describe a tradition of Gothic novels written by women since the end of the eighteenth century, some scholars have recently opposed that denomination, arguing, for instance that heroinism already existed before this time, notably in Richardson’s novels, and that this characterization is the reflection of second wave feminism’s perspective on gothic novels, itself influenced by overtly critical nineteenth- and twentieth-century views of the

²⁵¹ Many women writers specialized in the genre at the end of the eighteenth century. If Ann Radcliffe dominated the 1790s, because of the extreme popularity of her works, there were other women Gothic writers at the same time who enjoyed relative popularity, such as Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, and Regina Maria Roche.

²⁵² For Ellen Moers, the expression “female gothic” refers to “the work that women have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic” (Moers 90). For her, however, it is Ann Radcliffe who had the privilege to frame the gothic form as being “a novel in which the central figure is a woman who is simultaneously a persecuted victim and courageous heroin[e]” (Moers 91).

Gothic.²⁵³ I do not wish to enter into such a debate, but I believe that the significant number of women who wrote Gothic novels at the end of the eighteenth century cannot be overlooked and considered as merely accidental. The same can be said of Gothic novels' prominent pattern of distressed but courageous persecuted young women.

Scholars generally agree in attributing to the Gothic narrative some standard general features, such as an oppressive ruin, a wild and sublime landscape, a spotless and distressed heroine, a villain who pursues this heroine with malevolent intentions, specters, dreams, dungeons, dead bodies, banditti, a catholic and feudal society, and a problematic love story.²⁵⁴ One may remark that the term Gothic refers primarily to medieval times, feudal values and chivalry, a period that used to be regarded since the Renaissance rather contemptuously, as obscure and uncivilized. In fact, the term Gothic itself was originally pejorative and, in fact, it retained a contemptuous signification until the last decades of the eighteenth century.²⁵⁵ The constant evocation of Gothic architecture, as well as a tendency to set the story in the Middle Ages, certainly demonstrates an intent among the authors of Gothic novels to reevaluate accepted understandings of a medieval past and to use this as

²⁵³ Ellen Ledoux argues convincingly that the label "female gothic" has tended to relegate to obscurity the works of some female novelists who were more conservative than Radcliffe, such as Clara Reeve, Sophia Lee, or Charlotte Dacre. Second wave feminists have been influenced in their denomination of the female Gothic by nineteenth-century perspectives on the Gothic, which considered Ann Radcliffe as the exception, a canonical figure of this genre, along with Mary Shelley and the Brontës. She objects to that perception and claims that "women's early gothic writings (...) [are] much more aesthetically, politically, thematically complex, and generally diverse than the female gothic characterization suggests" (Ledoux, 2). I tend to agree with her on that point and I hope that my interpretation of Radcliffe's work will reveal the complexity both of her ideas and of her aesthetic techniques.

²⁵⁴ See Robert Miles, *Ann Radcliffe. The Great Enchantress*, 2-3; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 9; Jerrold E. Hogle, "Introduction" to *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, 1-20.

²⁵⁵ See Peter Sabor, "From Terror to the Terror: Changing Concepts of the Gothic in Eighteenth-Century England," 170-171. In his article, Sabor demonstrates how in the late eighteenth century the name Gothic evolved from a pejorative interpretation relative to a barbarian age to a positive one. Gothic novels had an important impact on this change of perspective about Gothicism, while also contributing to a growing interest in the aesthetic of the sublime. See Peter Sabor, "From Terror to the Terror: Changing Concepts of the Gothic in Eighteenth-Century England," 165-178.

means through which to critique the age of Enlightenment. Since the feeling that most Gothic novels try to inspire in the utmost degree is terror, a term that is not only associated with the aesthetic of the sublime, but also with that part of the French Revolution where people were guillotined in large numbers, namely *la Terreur*,²⁵⁶ one might conclude that gothic novels were important modes through which to criticize dominant European Enlightenment ideas of culture and politics.

4.3 Sublimity, Fear, and Terror: Radcliffe's Appropriation and Critique of Burkean Aesthetics

A characteristic of the Gothic prominent in all Radcliffe's novels is the obvious intention to scare readers and to stimulate in them powerful sentiments of fear, awe, and terror. Ellen Moers has aptly insisted on the association of gothic with fear, and she is certainly right to attribute its success to the fact that people, in general, enjoy these sorts of sensations.²⁵⁷ As Burke insisted, sublime fear can be an object of delight.²⁵⁸ Gothic novels are therefore bent on the objective to provide to their readers this form of aesthetic experience. Ann Radcliffe, as a master of the genre, manipulates with dexterity all the mechanisms of terror, following for the most part the basic rules provided by Edmund Burke in his important essay, *A Philosophical Enquiry Concerning the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Situating himself in opposition to the classical sublime theorized in the

²⁵⁶ See Peter Sabor, "From Terror to the Terror: Changing Concepts of the Gothic in Eighteenth-Century England", 170-171.

²⁵⁷ For Ellen Moers, "early tributes to the power of the Gothic tended to emphasize the physiological" (*Literary Women* 91). According to her, Gothic writers were praised for their power to freeze the blood, and to make the flesh creep and the nerves thrill. She concludes that their success must depend on the fact that readers "enjoy these sensations" (Moers 91).

²⁵⁸ Edmund Burke distinguishes between pleasure, which is a positive feeling caused by something that is pleasant to us, and delight, which is a relative pleasure, obtained through the removal or moderation of pain. Hence, the sublime, which produces terror and pain, can be a source of delight if the danger or pain is "at certain distances" (Burke, *Enquiry* 34) and undergoes "certain modifications" (34).

first century A.D. by Longinus,²⁵⁹ Burke associates the aesthetical category of the sublime with the emotion of terror. He suggests that sublimity in nature or in art provokes in us astonishment and horror. This powerful emotion suspends all our faculties and motions, while the sublime object occupies all our attention. In this state of stupor and awe, one cannot reason or reflect and is transported as by “an irresistible force” (Burke 47). The sublime produces in human beings sentiments of admiration, respect, and reverence. When Burke enquires into the qualities that an object must possess to provoke in humans the sentiment of the sublime, he insists that it should be fearful and terrifying, because, as he observes, “No passion actually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear” (Burke 47). Everything in nature that can excite terror in human beings will raise in them the idea of the sublime. Obscurity is also a major feature of the sublime tending to contribute to the emotion of terror. Humans are usually more prone to terrors when it is dark, because in obscurity they cannot correctly discern what surrounds them. In a state of darkness, the imagination envisages improbable perils and evils, and succumbs to superstitious beliefs about ghosts and goblins. Burke goes so far as to assert that obscurity is used by despotic governments to impose their power. According to him, they use it to conceal their leader or their idol from the public eye, creating mystery and awe, which in turn produces fear and respect. Despotic governments, for Burke, are founded on the passions of men, notably “upon the passion of fear” (48). As one can easily conclude, power is also a strong feature of the sublime, because whoever has a superior power can

²⁵⁹ For Longinus, the sublime is generally produced by words and is therefore specific to literature. It is produced by a certain “loftiness in writing” (11) through which souls are lifted and minds disposed “to lofty ideas” (Longinus 12). While it is characterized by a lofty and elevated style, it must avoid bombast. Its aim is to produce in the auditor or reader a “generous exultation,” which is “filled with joy and pride” (13). This idea of the sublime is not linked with terror and fear; it begets enthusiasm, joy, and generosity.

use it to hurt others and is therefore a potential source of pain. Pain is therefore the dominant emotion associated with the sublime, for Burke, while pleasure is more likely to be associated with beauty. There are other, less important, causes of the sublime, for Burke, such as vastness or infinity. He insists, however, on the cardinal importance of terror and on its correlating emotion, pain. As this chapter demonstrates, this strict dichotomy is challenged by Radcliffe.

The relationship between power, terror, obscurity, and tyranny, which is characteristic of the Gothic genre, can also be found in Ann Radcliffe's novels. As I will demonstrate, Radcliffe generally follows Burke's views on these characteristics of the sublime, even as she understands obscurity more broadly and metaphorically. If the absence of light is used by her as an ingredient of the sublime in many circumstances where the characters walk or linger during the night in dark forests, obscure abbeys, or castles, this device is more often used by her as metaphor through which to capture the figure, thoughts, and self-concealment of villains. The obscure machinations of villains induce in heroines and readers sentiments of terror and draw the readers towards important and concrete features of terror and power, which are embodied in individual characters, thus inducing in the reader a *cathartic* understanding of tyranny, oppression, and liberation. To investigate the connection between power, terror, and the sublime in Radcliffe's novels, I will examine closely the prominent characters of her three most important novels, *The Romance of the Forest*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *The Italian*.

Tyrannical power is an obvious feature of all Radcliffe's villains. Without this power, they would not be feared, and therefore they would not be sublime objects. The power they exert, however sublime, is always presented as unjust, irrational, and

immoderate. These characters seem to possess an immeasurable, infinite desire to control other people; their ambition of ruling their relatives, their household, and everybody they can reach, seems to be without limits. Their appetite for power is always coupled with an extreme desire to acquire wealth, property, and money. This domineering ambition gives them an incredible ascendancy over other people, and their authority is rarely questioned. These villains are also indifferent to others and appear deprived of any aesthetic sensibility. However, this aesthetic deprivation does not make them cold. On the contrary, they appear to be entirely dominated by strong passions. Unlimited passions of greed, lust, power, or resentful vengeance guide their behavior. To channel these passions into a successful outcome, they make use of cunning and dissimulation, combining them with prudential restraint. We can infer from these characteristics on the personalities of villains that, for Radcliffe, tyrannical power does not take its roots in sensibility, but in what Shaftesbury and Hutcheson would have classified with the selfish passions, the ones which obscure the moral sense and annul its influence on the individual's conduct.²⁶⁰

For moral sense theorists, such as Shaftesbury or Hutcheson, human beings can feel pleasure and pain from the reflections they make on the actions, affections, and feelings of others. In other words, they can perceive by the means of an inner sense whether an action is good or bad, through the pleasure and pain they experience from their reflection on this action. Although all humans must possess this inner sense, some seem deprived of any sensibility and therefore unable to tell right from wrong. For moral sense philosophers, this lack of sympathy for others can be explained by an excessive and disproportionate self-

²⁶⁰ See Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, Etc.*, 265-271; Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections. With Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, 29-31.

interest, as well as by uncontrolled passions, which confuse the judgment and extinguish any feeling that is not purely egoistic. Greed and a passion for gain are often described as the worse among these passions. They are also linked to what Mandeville or Hobbes would have called “private interest,” which requires rational calculation, cunning, and manipulation so that it may be satisfied. Contrary to moral sense philosophers, Mandeville and Hobbes promote self-interest as the basis of all human conduct and as a source of civilization and wealth. In *The Fable of the Bees*, Mandeville uses the allegory of a beehive to demonstrate how self-interested actions, such as avarice, greed, or ambition are a constant source of social benefits. For him, it is clear that “private vices” produce “public benefits.” The work opens with a poem comparing humans with bees, and the state with a beehive. The “moral” of the poem is afterward summarized as thus: “So vice is beneficial found, when it’s by justice lopped and bound; nay, where the people would be great, as necessary to the state, as hunger is to make them eat. Bare virtue can’t make nations live in splendor; they, that would revive a golden age, must be as free, for acorns, as for honesty” (13). Thomas Hobbes, for his part, argues that, in a state of nature, egoistic tendencies, which are natural to mankind, result in a perpetual war of every man against every man. However, to quit this miserable state of nature and enter a civilized one, humans can only be convinced by an appeal to their self-interest. Self-interest teaches humans to enter a civil state to limit their selfish passions through the means of a supreme power that everybody fears and respects. From the state of nature to the civil state, it is always, nonetheless, self-interest which guides humans toward what will be beneficial to them, and not public interest or a love for the public good, which for him does not exist. As he states

quite clearly, “We do not therefore by nature seek Society for its own sake, but that we may receive some Honour or Profit from it; these we desire Primarily” (Hobbes 25).

One can find a perfect illustration of this type of personality, in which selfish passions are channeled toward the acquisition of power, in the signor Montoni, the most famous character in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. He marries Madame Chéron, the heroine’s aunt and guardian, merely to secure her money and her estates in Languedoc. Montoni is mostly ruined, and he needs to find money to fulfill his will for power. All his apparent wealth and grandeur is a sham by which he hopes to delude a rich woman into marrying him. Montoni is not even the legitimate owner of his castle, Udolpho, which he has usurped from his previous owner, a distant relative, who disappeared a long time ago. From this usurped place, he conducts military, political, and criminal operations as a sort of *condottiere*. In his gloomy and decayed castle, he terrorizes everybody and maintains his power through the fear and respect he inspires in them. Not being rich, nor politically important, he nevertheless possesses a surprising authority over his men and his family, which seems to rest in personal qualities which have the power to awe and terrify others, such as a mysterious spell referred to as “his conscious superiority” (288), his “decisive look and manner” (288), and the “vigor of his thought” (288). Without great contestation, all his companions submit to him, “as to a power, that they had no right to question” (288). He appears, indeed, as an accomplished despot, repeating, like an ominous litany, throughout the novel, “I won’t be trifled with.”

When Emily comes to Udolpho with Montoni and her aunt, she rapidly understands that there, in this limited and isolated place, the tyranny of Montoni will be decupled and that she might then find herself entirely in his power. On this subject, Radcliffe is

peremptory: despots and tyrants can best exert their empire over people if they confine them in isolated places. There, their tyranny encounters no limits. This is probably why, in Gothic novels such as Radcliffe's, the villains choose to imprison their victims within the walls of fortified and remote castles, convents or abbeys.²⁶¹ Montoni's tyranny first exerts itself on Emily's aunt, who being very proud and imperious herself, refuses to transfer to him, as a husband, all her properties in France. She distrusts him with money, having been the witness of his passion for gaming. She is also described as being stubborn and uncompromising. To force her to bequeath all her possessions to him, Montoni uses continual threats. Unable to gain the object of his wishes, he finally resorts to cruelty and confines her to her room, and later on, to a remote chamber in a forlorn turret. Emily is unable to do anything to help her aunt and receives no information about the place where she has been removed. A rumor of her probable death begins to spread. Terrified by Montoni, and ignorant of her aunt's fate, Emily summons all her courage to seek him and to interrogate him. Seeing him as a potential assassin, a person able to use all his power to destruct anybody who opposes his will, she is hardly able to look at him, or to utter anything when faced with his awful, dark, terrorizing, and sublime presence, "As she looked on his dark countenance, she again thought she saw the murderer of her aunt; and her mind was so convulsed with horror, that she had no power to recall thought enough to explain the purport of her visit" (361).

²⁶¹ In *The Romance of the Forest*, the character of Adeline is rescued by a fugitive, Mr. La Motte, and his family, and then takes refuge with them in an old, ruined, and forlorn abbey. The place is mysterious, and gloomy, and it contains the remains of a dead body. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the novel's heroine, Emily, is forced to sojourn in an old and decayed medieval castle, Udolpho, which is full of dark mysteries, including the famous "black veil." In *The Italian*, the protagonist's lover, Vivaldi, is imprisoned in the old buildings of the Inquisition in Rome, which contains dungeons, goals, crypts, and horrifying instruments of torture.

This terrifying encounter between Emily and Montoni is described by Radcliffe in terms that evoke Burke's conceptions of the sublime. In this passage, Radcliffe follows Burke's association between intense fear and the sublime and provides a concrete illustration of how sublime terror can freeze the mind and impede reflection or thought. However, one might remark that she chooses the term *horror* instead of *terror*. This choice reflects a certain particularity in her comprehension of the sublime. Contrary to Burke, Radcliffe holds that terror can be compatible with reflection and action, while horror cannot. As she explains in her essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry*, "Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (6). She insists on distinguishing between horror and terror, which are used as synonyms by Burke, because she perceives them as being two distinct sensations. Her distinction between terror and horror explains precisely why, for instance, although Montoni is a powerful and terrifying figure, Emily is nonetheless able to confront and resist him in multiple instances. Radcliffe demonstrates that the horror Emily feels towards Montoni gradually transforms itself into terror, so that the sublime emotion, instead of paralyzing her and subjecting her to another's power, arouses her "slumbering mind" (361) recalls her scattered spirits and determines "fortitude into action" (379). Radcliffe seems therefore to have developed, in opposition to Burke, a conception of the sublime, which produces, instead of submission and dejection, resistance and courage in the face of oppression. For her, the feeling of terror can arouse fortitude; it thus recalls the subject's intellectual powers, enabling him/her to make decisions and to act upon them.

However, for Radcliffe, not all powers are to be resisted, only unjust ones. If Montoni's power has been just and generous, its sublimity might not have incited fortitude or courage, but rather gratitude and admiration. It is, therefore, according to Radcliffe, the injustice of his power, the unlawful, greedy, capricious direction of his will, that transforms sublime terror into a courage that is necessary to combat and resist it. Emily finds in the injustice of Montoni's power the strength to resist him, however terrifying his presence might be. As she says to Montoni, "the strength of my mind is equal to the justice of my cause; and that I can endure with fortitude, when it is in resistance of oppression" (381). As Montoni mocks her, saying contemptuously, "you speak like a heroine!" (381), and suggesting that her heroinism is only a pose, something fictitious that she would not be able to sustain in the face of real danger, one wonders where the fiction really lies: in Montoni's terrible figure, or in Emily's heroinism?

4.4 The Power of the Imagination and the Moral and Political Dimensions of the Sublime

What Radcliffe seems to suggest is that Montoni's power and terrifying appearance, are, in large part, a creation of Emily's imagination, a literary fantasy that can be defeated and deflated by the same means employed to fabricate it. As Radcliffe tells us, Montoni's power, being found unjust, suddenly ceases "to appear so terrible" (381) to Emily's imagination, as "it was wont to do" (381). Somehow, when Emily recognizes her own moral superiority over Montoni, his authority is greatly altered. As it is announced in the novel, Emily feels "for the first time (...) the full extent of her own superiority to Montoni, and despised the authority, which, till now, she had only feared" (381-382). In these passages, Radcliffe goes beyond Burke's theory of the sublime in assigning to the aesthetic

imagination, ignited by sublime emotions, an important political role of resistance to oppression.

Of course, many things can be said against the political power of aesthetic sensibility and the imagination. For instance, Mary Poovey has argued that Radcliffe never really offers persecuted women concrete ways to combat oppression and to change the structure of what she calls “paternalistic society” (311). For her, sensibility and sentimental values can only provide “the rationale, never the power for social or political action” (314). She adds that “the genuine creature of sensibility is self-effacing” (314) and remains therefore “passive, dependent, inferior” (314-315). David Durant, for his part, contends that Radcliffe fails to fight or transform the individualistic, selfish world in which she lived. For him, she rather advocates for a complete escape from the world in ideal pastoral and familial isolated units. In short, he argues that Radcliffe’s novels do not engage with the world in order to render it more humane and just but rather depart from it. “Her novels,” he contends, “are, finally, otherworldly. They do not offer their readers ways of dealing with the mundane world but escape from it” (529). In similar way, Kim Ian Michasiw argues that the power of the understanding to dissipate terrified illusions of power and restore the heroines to the sense of their own capacity and strength is impotent in the face of real power.²⁶² For him, the understanding can overthrow imagined despots but is ineffective when confronted with real threats, like the Inquisition in *The Italian* or the other forms of political power presented in *The Romance of the Forest*. These critics question in various ways the ability conferred by Radcliffe to aesthetic sensibility and enlightened reason, to empower the victims of oppression.

²⁶² See Kim Ian Michasiw, “Ann Radcliffe and the Terror of Power,” 335-337.

Such scholarly analysis, while thought-provoking, remains unfortunately inadequate, largely because it ignores the complexity of Radcliffe's position with regards to aesthetic sentiment and reason. For instance, Mary Poovey takes for granted that sensibility is weak and passive, but for Radcliffe, sensibility can have two opposite effects, passive or active, as I will demonstrate below. Durant assumes that Radcliffe's critique of the world is a rejection of modernity in favor of a traditional vision of family and pastoral life, but one must remember that Radcliffe is influenced by Romanticism and by Rousseau's philosophy, which were, at the end of the eighteenth-century the latest fashion in European thought. Far from being obsolete, she shares the contemporary Romantics' longing for a more simple and natural way of life, which is a direct critique of the Enlightenment enthusiasm for reason and civilization. For his part, Michasiw presumes that it is only through the understanding that the victims of tyrants can confront their illusional power, but Radcliffe insists repeatedly on the power of sublime aesthetical feelings to soothe, elevate, and transport victims' mind and help them fight tyrannical power. Acknowledging that such critiques are important, I attempt to show that Radcliffe's position about the possibility of overcoming fear and combating tyrannical power through aesthetic emotion and the imagination is not as delusional and false as the above critics purport. For this purpose, a more precise analysis of Radcliffe's understanding of sensibility and aesthetic sentiments is necessary.

Sensibility, understood as the ability to be touched by beauty and sublimity in nature and in humans, and to feel sympathy and benevolence towards others, is never fundamentally criticized by Radcliffe. However, she frequently warns her reader that it must be moderated by reason in order to be useful to its possessor and to others. If the

susceptibility is too strong, as is the case when the mind is seized with horror, the individual can be placed in a position where it becomes impossible to think consistently and to defend himself/herself. The understanding must therefore limit excessive emotions and enlighten the imagination about what is plausible. However, Radcliffe clearly indicates that *it is* terror and the aesthetic sublime—and not reason—which awakens a person’s mind and will and prompts her into action. Like Hume before her, Radcliffe is persuaded that only sentiment can determine the will to action. Conversely, no reasoning can persuade the mind to act morally.²⁶³ For her, the aesthetic experience of the sublime, induced by terror, is the better way to collect one’s courage and intellect and afford resistance to tyranny. Therefore, she does not seem to advocate in favor of the common Enlightenment thesis that tyranny, like superstition, must be combated through critical doubt; rather, she reminds us of our own imaginative powers, which can create monsters, but which can also offer alternate visions and other possibilities that have the potential to dispel the tyrant’s power.

Radcliffe’s conception of the sublime also has a moral grounding. As suggested above, a heroine’s courage is inspired by the discovery of her moral superiority over her oppressor. This moral dimension of the sublime is not present in Burke’s works, but it does exist in Kant’s aesthetic theory, where the immense force of wild nature is considered somehow inferior to human’s moral destination. Radcliffe’s perspective on the sublime and on characters who present sublime traits shares some of the Kantian perspective, especially through the comparisons she makes between sublime characters and wilderness, as well as through her evocation of a moral destination of mankind, which transcends the

²⁶³ Hume rejects the idea that morality can be founded on rational arguments. For him, morality is “more properly felt than judged of” (*Treatise* 240). We judge an action to be virtuous because it produces a feeling of pleasure in us, without any reflection. See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, 240-243.

forces of nature. For instance, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Montoni appears as the embodiment of the unruly, chaotic forces of nature, which seem to defy all the power of feeble humans. However, as is the case in Kant's conception of the sublime, the overwhelming terror that seems to block all of one's strength, can suddenly be transformed into the expansion of all of one's faculties through the awareness of his/her moral superiority over nature. Kant defines the contrasting emotions produced by the sublime as a pain followed by a pleasure. This pain is attributed to the inadequacy of the faculties of imagination and reason to arrive at a definite representation of the sublime form, because of its vastitude or power. The same inadequacy is also, nonetheless, a source of pleasure when the subject realizes that nature, in all its force and greatness, is unable to embody or represent our superior moral ideas, such as freedom and moral law. Therefore, the mind is elevated, assuming a sentiment of respect for its own moral and thus supernatural destination. Kant specifies therefore that it is not the object or nature in general that is sublime, but our moral ideas. Consequently, it is only by a sort of subreption that we attribute sublimity to the object.²⁶⁴ The feeling of the sublime contains therefore two

²⁶⁴ In her postcolonial reading of Kant's sublime, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak insists on representing this subreption as a mere trope, which points toward a mistake of attribution, or a *metalepsis*, the sublime being incorrectly attributed to nature, when it in reality refers to human moral ideas. Transforming an argument into a mere trope, this reading also suggests that for Kant this *metalepsis* is only accessible to the cultured human, because moral feelings, although natural, needs culture to be articulated into that specific emotion called the sublime. According to Spivak, Kant therefore asserts that an "uneducated man" (*Critique of Judgment* 78) cannot accede to sublimity, but only to terror. For Spivak, this interpretation suggests that the sublime is a European feeling, that is not available to the uncivilized men. It also shows an imperialist bias toward non-European communities, which appear as barbaric and savage. It may even justify colonization as a means of moralization. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Postcolonial Critique of Reason*, 4-7. For my part, I do not believe that we can reduce Kant's argumentation about the sublime to a mere trope and view it simply as imperialist thought. Surely, Kant was a man of his time and partakes of some of his epoch's prejudices about women and non-European cultures. His more anthropological and empirical works show this plainly. However, in his three *Critiques*, he attempts to speak about the human subject in a way independent of nationality or gender, his perspective being transcendental. If some suggest that he has failed in his endeavor at complete objectivity and impartiality, we have at least to admit that he intended to think about human minds in general. For him, every human or "rational being" possesses *a priori* the moral law and freedom of the will, and all minds are structured by the same basic faculties. Hence, the "uneducated

moments, a moment of pain due to the mind's incapacity to represent greatness and force in nature, and a moment of pleasure, when the subject realizes the transcendent superiority of human moral ideas over nature. This fluctuation of opposite feelings is described by Kant as "a quickly alternating attraction towards, and repulsion from, the same Object" (72). This moral interpretation of the sublime applies directly to Montoni, whose terrorizing force, which is alternately terrorizing and inspiring, can be combated and defeated by the conscious moral superiority of its victim.

There is another particularity of Radcliffe's conception of the sublime that does not necessarily follow Burke's criteria. Contrary to Burke, the sublime and the beautiful are not firmly and thoroughly distinguished in Radcliffe's novels, in which these categories, at times, even merge. She maintains Burke's characterizations of the beautiful as being small, soft, delicate, variegated, colorful, and pleasant, but she refuses to view it, as Burke does, as a potential object of contempt.²⁶⁵ On the other hand, she attributes to sublime landscapes or works of art the power to soothe and calm the agitations of the mind, which are, for Burke, the effects of the beautiful. Contrary to Burke, she even seems to assert that the best aesthetic experience is offered through the *contrast* between beautiful scenes and sublime

man" can be European as well, because culture, by definition, can only develop based on nature and all humans are basically natural subjects at first. In way of a proof, when Kant gives an example of an uneducated man, he mentions a European, more specifically a Savoyard peasant, and not an African or a Native American man. See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 78. Moreover, if a certain culture remains necessary to feel the sublimity of moral ideas through the representation of natural force or greatness, this feeling for Kant is not produced by culture as such, it is not merely conventional, but it has its "roots in human nature" (78). For him, humans are naturally disposed to feel the sublimity of moral ideas, but this feeling must be awakened and developed through culture. One can also remark that in the discussion of the sublime, the idea of culture is only mentioned in section 29. It may therefore appear exaggerated to put too much emphasis on an aspect of the sublime that is not even central to Kant's aesthetics. Finally, the argumentation about the sublime is a very complex and profound one; it is connected to all Kant's earlier philosophical developments in the First and Second *Critique*. It seems rather unjust to reduce it to a mere figure of style or a trope.

²⁶⁵ Burke associates the passion of love with beauty and the feelings of fear and respect with the sublime. Hence, what is beautiful cannot be an object of respect and is often, however loved, despised. He gives the example of dogs: we love them, but the "appellation" dog is used disrespectfully, as a term of reproach. See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 55.

traits in nature, as if the contrast in itself was the ideal pathway to a theological elevation from nature in general to the cosmos and to God. This theological orientation and the strength it might give to the joined aesthetic experience of sublimity and beauty, is for Radcliffe a powerful source of empowerment and hope.²⁶⁶ According to her, nature is not the only source of an aesthetic experience of sublimity and beauty. It can also be experienced through art. Radcliffe contends that poetry and music can provide endurance, strength, and consolation for the distressed and the oppressed, a property they do not possess in Burke's theory. As some of the critics mentioned above claim, one can of course wonder if these aesthetic means can produce genuine emancipation. One can also question if they can offer a real means of resistance, as opposed to an agreeable escape from reality. This is evident in some key passages from Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Italian*.

Beauty and sublimity in scenes of nature have the power to sooth the afflicted soul, giving it strength and resistance in the face of oppression. When, in *The Italian*, Ellena is confined in a solitary room in a convent because of her persistent refusal to renounce her love for Vincentio di Vivaldi, she finds, one day, her door unlocked and ventures out through it. There, a narrow staircase conducts her to a little chamber, situated in a small turret, where she has the pleasure to contemplate, through large windows, a sublime scene. She beholds "thence a horizon, and a landscape below, whose grandeur" (105) awakens her heart. When she sees such a sublime picture, "the consciousness of her prison [is] lost"

²⁶⁶ Ann Chandler and Robert J. Mayhew have retraced Radcliffe's indebtedness to late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theologians and their idea of natural theology, that is, a theology that is compatible with natural sciences and close to our experience of nature. These theologians defend the famous argument from design, which was quite famous throughout the eighteenth century, and pretended to deduce the existence of God through the beauty and sublimity of nature and the cosmos. See Ann Chandler, "Ann Radcliffe and Natural Theology," 133-153; Robert J. Mayhew, "Latitudinarianism and the Novels of Ann Radcliffe," 273-301.

(104). Contemplating the mountain and the precipices below, which are broken into cliffs, and looking at the forest of chestnut at their bottom, she feels a “dreadful pleasure” (106). Her mind is thus “highly elevated” (106) and “sweetly soothed” (106) by “scenes of nature” (106). Pleased by the scenery, Ellena then returns very often to the chamber in the turret in order to “acquire strength” (106) and to bear “the persecutions that might await her” (106). From this description of Ellena’s experience of the sublime, we must conclude that for Radcliffe, sublime scenes can soothe the mind and strengthen it against persecution and oppression. Moreover, this passage suggests that the contrast of the sublime precipices with “the softening of the plains” (106) the “gradation between the variegated cultivation there” (106), and “the awful wildness of the rocks above” (106), guides Ellena’s imagination toward the idea of a harmonious and balanced creation. This gradation from soothing beautiful valleys to stupendous sublime mountains is presented by Radcliffe as the foundation of an emancipating and liberating aesthetic pleasure, which has cosmic and theological undertones. When Ellena gazes on the great and admirable natural scene before her, she is able to lift the veil that conceals the Deity “from the eyes of his creatures” (106). For Radcliffe, God is revealed in nature; he is really “dwelling” (106) amidst his “sublime works” (106). In other words, the gradation from beautiful valleys to sublime heights allows the human mind to embrace the grandeur of nature and its creator, and to consider human suffering and transaction as insignificant in comparison to the whole universe and the power of God. However close this experience of sublimity and beauty is to the famous argument from design, which deduced God’s existence from its natural creations, Radcliffe does not argue nor deduce anything explicitly in the passage explored above; rather, she uses the strong affects produced by the gothic genre, to reveal God’s presence in the world

through the mixed emotions of fear and admiration.²⁶⁷ What Radcliffe seems to imply is that the human desire to subjugate and dominate other humans is ludicrous when compared with the grandeur and vastness of nature and the whole cosmos. Therefore, her heroines find in the sublimity of nature not only a consolation but an awareness of their value and power over forces of oppression. More specifically, this awareness lies prominently in their consciousness of being morally superior to their oppressor and in the independence of the soul. Elevated and inspired by the sublimity of the scenes she beholds, Ellena comes to understand that “man, the giant who now held her in captivity, would shrink to the diminutiveness of a fairy” (107) because his ultimate force is unable to “to enchain her soul or compel her to fear him, while he was destitute of virtue” (107). It seems therefore, contrary to what Mary Poovey and David Durant have asserted, that the aesthetic experience of the sublime in Radcliffe’s novels, notably in its contrast with the beautiful, offers political empowerment for the oppressed and encourages resistance instead of passivity and obedience. As Kirsten M. Girtten writes of Radcliffe, “Her Gothic should be read not as a nostalgic lamentation for the past . . . , but rather as an enthusiastic expression of hope” (718).

The moral tonality of this resistance is, as we have seen, close to Kant’s understanding of the sublime, to whom the negative delight—preceded by pain and fear—brought about by the sublime is instigated by the respect humans feel toward their moral destination, which appears superior even to all the forces of nature. As mentioned above, what Kant is implying is that what is really sublime is not nature, but the moral law and

²⁶⁷ Ann Chandler argues convincingly that Radcliffe, although influenced by physio-theology and the argument of design, differs from theologians in the fact that she “affirms divine presence instead of deducing it from the creation” (135).

the human will that is determined by this law. As he writes, “The feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own destination, which by a certain subreption we attribute to an object of nature” (71). He explains that our imagination discovers in the experience of the sublime that nature, however powerful and vast, can never represent adequately the supreme grandeur of moral ideas such as freedom and the moral law, and thus it remains inferior to them. We can observe a similar conviction in Radcliffe’s novels, which depict the moral superiority of the heroine’s soul against the physical attempts by which villains try to control her. In both cases, sublimity is transferred from natural physical powers to the subject’s moral quality. For Kant, the aesthetic experience of the sublime signals a world beyond nature, a “moral world” determined by freedom and the moral law, which Kant called in the *Groundworks of the Metaphysics of Morals*: “a kingdom of Ends” (45).²⁶⁸ Radcliffe seems also to nourish, through the experience of the sublime, a hope that gestures towards the existence of a moral world composed of virtuous human beings. However, an important difference remains between these two thinkers: Radcliffe does not reduce sublimity to the human’s moral destination only, but applies it to nature itself, conceived as the “dwelling” of God. This is significant, because instead of turning the aesthetic emotion of the sublime into a mere subjective experience, she uses it to expand the mind beyond subjective limits, as if aesthetic emotions had the power to open the subject and pour it into the world. This non-subjective perspective gives to her moral and political hopes more concreteness, as I explain below.

²⁶⁸ The concept of a kingdom of ends follows the explanation of the third formulation of the categorical imperative, the formula of autonomy. According to this formula, every human subject is a lawgiver not only for himself, but for all rational beings, and therefore should envision a nature or a world under moral laws as the result of his legislation. See Immanuel Kant, *Groundworks for A Metaphysical of Morals*, 45 (Ak.4, 438). The kingdom of ends is one of the multiple versions of Kant’s central conception of the highest good. On this subject, see Marceline Morais, *Le souverain bien et la fin dernière de la philosophie*.

4.5 The Dangers of a Distempered Imagination and Two Opposing Effects of the Sublime

What can be inferred from Ellena's experience in the turret and from Emily's confrontation with Montoni is that tyrannical monsters can be regarded, after some reflection, as being partly creatures of the imagination, whose power over us is largely proportionate to the importance we give them, when we are prey to what Radcliffe calls a "distempered imagination" (*The Mysteries of Udolpho* 296). Even the most terrifying of all Radcliffe villains, father Schedoni, who plots until his death to satisfy his selfish ambitions at the cost of whoever might be an impediment to their realization, finally reveals himself to be no supernatural being, but a simple mortal creature, who could lose everything, life included, like any other man. His death reduces his person to its normal and just proportions. The fantastic powers he has seemed to possess, we realize, were only the effect of the terror he has inspired in susceptible, superstitious minds. As Vincentio di Vivaldi remarks after having witnessed Schedoni's death: "a livid corpse was all that remained of the once terrible Schedoni" (*The Italian* 466). This observation leads us to suspect that for Radcliffe, the imagination and the feelings of the sublime can be envisaged as both liberating forces and enslaving ones. The aesthetic experience of the sublime can, as noted above, soothe the dejected mind, and arouse courage and resistance in the oppressed. In these situations, the mind expands itself into the world and feels a sense of community with other human beings as well as with the whole universe. This empowerment rests on the recognition of a human moral force to resist physical coercion and threat and appeals to the hope to participate in a better community, based on common tastes and shared values of sympathy and benevolence. However, feelings of the sublime, when experienced in response to men of power in gloomy architectural places can also

produce, according to Radcliffe, submission, demobilization, and passivity. The danger is that the imagination, excited by the aesthetic emotion of the sublime, will overrule reason and the understanding and construct terrifying fictions. Surrounded by its own frightful creations, the subject will therefore end up living in a dream. His/her life will be peopled with fantastical beings like ghosts and monsters instead of real persons. In this dreamy state, the imagination will project its own inner life into the world and transform it into a fiction. Everywhere, the subject will encounter nothing real, seeing only his/her own subjective creations. The result is not emancipating. Instead, it produces paralysis, terror, and confusion, making the subject powerless in the face of his/her own nightmarish visions. This remoteness from reality and imprisonment in one's dream is depicted in *The Mystery of Udolpho*, when Emily, terrorized by Montoni and by the strange superstitious stories and apparitions that seem to be associated with his gloomy castle, transforms Montoni and his dwelling into a supernatural and eerie place. As a result, "her present life" appears "like the dream of a distempered imagination, or like one of those frightful fictions, in which the wild genius of the poets sometimes delighted" (296). Imagination, thus, unbridled by reason, and excited by horror, creates a delirious and fictitious dream state, which incapacitates the individual, making him/her unable to pursue a concrete action or to make any decision.

Fatigue, oppression, mistreatment, and lack of sleep may render the imagination more susceptible to believe in its own fanciful delirium, Radcliffe implies. When Emily hears strange music from outside of her chamber, seeming to come from below, she associates it with the mysterious disappearance of the late owner of the chateau, even though there is no rational connection between these events. Her mind is then "impressed

with a high degree of solemn awe” (331). The narrator, however, reminds us that “long-sufferings had made her spirits peculiarly susceptible to terror, and liable to be affected by the illusions of superstition” (330), creating inconsistencies that are natural “when imagination guides the thoughts” (331). Therefore, for Radcliffe, imagination and sublime aesthetic emotions can be a source of strength and courage, as well as a cause of inaction and cowardice. For her, the imagination can enslave a person to its own imaginary fears, as the understanding loses its force. This unfortunate situation is more likely to happen when the person has experienced deep fatigue and fear. When Adeline, in *The Romance of the Forest*, quits France, where she had escaped the murderous attempts of The Marquis de Montalt, her former admirer, her first reaction upon seeing the Alps is one of sublime enthusiasm, which inspires in her courage and hope. However, through the effects of fatigue and nervous agitation, her enthusiasm diminishes, replaced by wild fears and abatement. The sublime grandeur of the scene “which had lately awakened emotions of delightful sublimity, now awed her into terror” (241) because her spirits have been weakened by the “effects of long anxiety and fatigue” (241). As we can see, for Radcliffe, the sublime can be delightful and begets hope and courage to fight adversity, but it can also terrorize to the point of paralysis and encourage a submission to one’s fate.

Ann Radcliffe’s position about the liberating power of aesthetic emotions and the imagination, is always tempered in her novels by the Enlightenment belief in the mischievous nature of superstition and imagined terrors. For Radcliffe and most of the Enlightenment philosophers, a lack of reasoning and critical thinking leaves the emotions and the imagination masters of the soul, predisposing the individual to passivity and submission. Even if Radcliffe’s resort to a rational explanation of seemingly supernatural

forces was disappointing to some readers, such as Walter Scott, this rationalistic tendency is consistent with her position about the imagination and aesthetic emotions, which she insisted could be positive or negative forces in human beings.²⁶⁹ Radcliffe, however, refuses to cast away as dangerous and pernicious all appeals to aesthetic sublime emotions, seeing them as capable of enlarging and enhancing the powers of the imagination. Not only does she reveal how aesthetic emotions and the sublime can empower and confer hope to the distressed mind, but she also indicates that without an important aesthetic sensibility and corresponding imagination, true solidarity, companionship, and sympathy could never exist. Moreover, she suggests that these irrational features of the mind, when well regulated, are the basis of a just society.

4.6 Aesthetic Disposition and Moral Value: The Sublime and the Beautiful as Ecstatic or Egoistic Emotions

Radcliffe's villains are often presented as deprived of aesthetic sensibility and of any feelings of sympathy. This is particularly true of Signor Montoni and father Schedoni, who show no peculiar taste for fine arts or for the sublime spectacle of nature. These insensible villains are driven solely by selfish passions such as greed, ambition, and revenge. They also seem incapable of generosity, benevolence, and sympathy, as if there were, for Radcliffe, a determinate connection between the capacity to experience aesthetic emotions and the capacity to feel for others. However, one of them, the Marquis de Montalt of *The Romance of the Forest*, as some have argued, appears to contradict this general assumption.²⁷⁰ He appears indeed as an amateur of music, painting, and architecture.

²⁶⁹ See Walter Scott, *Lives of Novelists*, 326-327.

²⁷⁰ Jakub Lipski shows that villains in Radcliffe's novels can be susceptible to art and have taste and use it to lure their victims, charming them into passivity and obedience. See Jakub Lipski, "The Perils of Aesthetic Pleasure in Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*," 120-134.

Exploring the peculiar case of the Marquis deepens our understanding of Radcliffe's position regarding the relationship between aesthetical sensibility and morality. It clarifies where she stands among the moral sense philosophers with respect to this relationship. As seen in chapter two, Shaftesbury, and Hume, however differently, hold that morality is grounded in a sort of moral sense, which the former calls a natural public affection and the latter a natural sympathy. The two men agree in aligning this moral sense with taste.²⁷¹ For them, to have taste and to feel what is morally good or bad attest to the presence in humans of a power of discrimination that does not lie in concepts, but in a sort of receptive feeling. If Ann Radcliffe basically agrees with this relationship between morality and taste, she also contends, as I will demonstrate through an examination of key passages taken from *The Romance of the Forest*, that a taste for beauty and the arts is not always a sign of morality and humanity in the person who possesses it. While beauty can soothe the afflicted mind and therefore be a source of consolation in adversity, it can also enfeeble and paralyze it, like a drug, disposing the soul to lose its rational control and abandon itself to pleasure and licentiousness. Therefore, a taste for beauty, for Radcliffe, can reveal a disposition for morality as well as a disposition for dissipation and lucre. The difference seems to depend on the type of art that is appreciated and on the part of the mind involved in the appreciation. Close to Plato's position about art, discussed in chapter two, Radcliffe seems to indicate that when art only touches the senses and inspires feelings of pleasure, without reaching the understanding or reason, it weakens this part of the mind, resulting in violent or voluptuous passions. For Radcliffe, the Marquis, with his wonderful palace, full of elegant frescos and decorations, and with gardens artistically arranged, cannot offer to the

²⁷¹ See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 241 and 247; Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, Etc.*, 251-252.

genuine morally disposed mind the sort of sublime and beautiful aesthetic emotions offered by the grandeur of the Alps, the gloom of ruined gothic castles, or the true and authentic images flowing from great poets such as Shakespeare, Milton, or Thomson. It can only weaken the understanding, dissolve moral principles, unnerve the senses, and let the passions grow without restraint. Moreover, such an aesthetic experience is *egoistic*; it relates only to the person's feelings, desires, and passions, seeking to satisfy them all. On the contrary, a true aesthetic experience of the sublime and the beautiful for Radcliffe is *ecstatic*; it does not enclose the person in herself, but brings her outside of herself, into the world, embracing nature and other humans as fellow companions and members of the same cosmic order. If morality relies on a sort of sympathy or on natural public affection, it demands that we place ourselves in the place of others so that we can suffer what they suffer, as if it was happening to us. Therefore, it does not enclose an individual in his/her subjectivity but opens it in order to reach others. For Radcliffe, as the following passages will demonstrate, true aesthetic experience incites in the individual a disposition to feel what others feel and to trespass his/her own subjectivity to reach others and the world at large.

Having been abducted by a servant of the Marquis, Adeline is conducted by force to his palace and is at first struck and amazed by the beauty and magnificence of the place. We are told that the walls are "painted in fresco, representing scenes from Ovid" (*Romance of the Forest* 156), that the sofas are "of a silk to suit the hangings" (156), and that "busts of Horace, Ovid, Anacreon, Tibullus and Petronus Arbiter, adorned the recesses" (156). In such a scene, all the senses are sollicitated: touch, by the softness of the silk; sight, by the frescos; smell, by "the most delicious perfume" (156); taste, by a refined assemblage of

“fruit, ices and liquors” (156); and hearing, by “the notes of soft music,” which wakes “the soul to tenderness and pensive pleasure” (157). The fact that the busts represent Ancient Latin poets is consistent with Radcliffe’s ideas about art, since, without denying the beauty of these works, she questions their morality.²⁷² When she quotes poetry in her novels—which is very often, notably in the form of epigraphs— she almost always chooses Renaissance and Classical poets such as Shakespeare and Milton, or contemporary ones, such as Beattie and Thomson. She seems to associate licentiousness, depravation and hedonism with Antiquity, a tendency that suits her taste for the Middle Ages and Renaissance poetry, and for gothic ruins and chivalry, which seem to embody for her simplicity, purity, dignity, and grandeur. This explains why, despite all the cruelty, selfishness, and tyrannical tendencies, which make vicious and immoral Signor Montoni and his companions in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily cannot but admire the chivalric virtues they also possess. She admires “their martial air, mingled with the haughtiness of the noblesse of those days” (173) and appreciates in Montoni himself the “high chivalric air of his figure” (172). Following Burke’s position, expressed in his *Essay on the Revolution in France*, Radcliffe shows a predilection for chivalric values and morals over certain contemporary attitudes and tastes.²⁷³ She therefore advocates for the superiority of

²⁷² According to Chloe Chard, Ovid, as the author of *Ars Amatoria* and the putative lover of Augustus’s sister, Julia, had in the eighteenth century a reputation of licentiousness and profligacy. All the other Roman poets mentioned are representative of a certain form of “light-hearted hedonism” (Chard 378-379) that suits the Marquis’s seductive intentions.

²⁷³ In his *Essay on The Revolution in France*, Burke harshly criticizes the revolutionary ideas produced by Enlightenment rationalism. According to him, the great moral ideals of the Enlightenment, the rational theories about the rights of men and the utilitarian calculations of pleasure and pain beget terror and horror and transform humans into brutal, unfeeling, and cruel creatures. He longs therefore for the lost values of chivalry where nobleness, generosity to the poor, and courtesy towards women distinguished the knight from the vulgar masses. As he declares, “the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists; and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever” (63).

an aesthetic conception, which raises what is wild, grand, and simple over ornamented, refined, and sensuous artistic productions.

Surrounded by the lavish artistic display of the Marquis de Montalt's palace, where her senses are affected in a delicious and pleasurable way, Adeline's mind falters and her understanding weakens; she experiences the power of a sort of spell that seems designed to take control of her will and to enslave her. Aware of what is thus happening to her, she exclaims, "What can this mean! ... Is this a charm to lure me to destruction?" (157). From Adeline's reaction to Montalt's display of finery, we can infer that for Radcliffe, power, and tyranny, although they are enforced generally by unfeeling, inhumane, aesthetically deprived individuals, can also be associated with a certain form of taste and with some forms of art, which lure the victim into obedience and passivity. However, she contends that a mind that has received a proper education and in which solid moral principles and a strong understanding have been developed, can resist this sort of artistic seduction. Hence, for Radcliffe, if a proper sensibility and an aesthetic receptivity to sublime scenes of nature, pure poetry, and lyrical music reveals a predisposition to morality, the lack of them suggest quite the reverse; thus, a strong understanding and the presence of solid moral principles are necessary to resist sophistry and artistic seductions of all sorts. Her insistence on the importance of exerting rational judgment and acquiring moral instruction connects Radcliffe to the Enlightenment tradition, as did her intention to explain away the supernatural through the evocation of its natural causes, and her warnings against superstition and the illusions of fancy. However, her nostalgia for chivalric values and Gothic ruins, and her distaste for too much luxury and refined arts and decorations, reveals

her affinity with Romanticism and a sympathy for Rousseau's distrust of civilization.²⁷⁴ Unwilling to let go of reason to embrace sentiment and passion, she consistently advocates for a sort of middle ground where reason and sentiment unite and converge, forming an ideal synthesis.

Despite her reserve concerning certain forms of art and the corrupting effect of too much refinement, Radcliffe strongly supports in her novels the idea of a close relationship between aesthetic susceptibility to sublime and beautiful scenes in nature and art, and the possession of a generous, benevolent mind, able to feel for others and to sympathize with their distress. This aesthetic susceptibility also seems to involve the possession of a great imagination, without which the faculty to go outside of our egoistic concerns, to reach others and nature, is forever barred. One passage in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* clearly demonstrates Radcliffe's association of aesthetic taste, imagination, and sympathy for others. While traversing the Alps to get into Italy, Emily, struck with awe and admiration before the wild and terrifying spectacle of these mountains, is led through her imagination into the ancient past. She imagines the situation into which Hannibal and his soldiers must have been led, and the pain they had experienced when they were wandering alone in these desolated summits, and she feels intense pity and sympathy toward them. While Emily is experiencing these feelings of sublimity and sympathy, Mme Montoni remains insensible

²⁷⁴ For Rousseau, civilization, education, and society conspire to destroy humans' natural compassion for others and tend to reinforce their desire for self-preservation. Consequently, the voice of conscience lies dormant and is obscured in the enlightened person who lives in advanced societies. Sympathy toward others, or what Rousseau calls "natural pity," is extinguished by means of rational self-interest induced by education and habit. Instead of the gentle natural equilibrium between a care for ourselves and a just compassion for others, we may find in refined and rationalized societies a burst of individualistic and egoistic passions formed around personal interest, ambition, and greed. Therefore, according to Rousseau, the development of reason and civilization have not increased our morality, because " C'est la raison qui engendre l'amour-propre; et c'est la réflexion qui le fortifie; C'est elle qui replie l'homme sur lui-même ; c'est elle qui le sépare de tout et l'afflige; C'est la philosophie qui l'isole" (*Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* 97).

to the spectacle before her. She shudders and turns her head from it. Isolated and enclosed in her thoughts, she envisions with delight her future in Italy—in Venice, most specifically—where she might, as the Signora Montoni, live like a princess. Emily, for her part, although she is fearful of what might happen to her in Italy, is able to rise above her selfish concerns and to experience rapture and admiration in response to the scenes before her. She is caught and enthralled by “the solitary grandeur of the objects” that surround her, such as “the mountain-region towering above” (165), “the deep precipices that fell beneath” (165), “the weaving blackness of the forests” (165), “the headlong torrents” (166), all sublime in their wild aspect, while also finding peace with the “reposing beauty of the Italian landscape below” (166). What Emily experiences is the delight that may come from terror, as Burke would have put it, or the sudden growth of one’s vital forces that sublime emotions inspire, as Kant would have termed it, in which she forgets her own little personal problems to contemplate the infinite grandeur of nature itself and all the creatures and humans who are part of it. Her aesthetic delight is increased by her imagination, which can go farther than what is actually before her, allowing her mind to envisage the future or the past. While she fancies the past with imaginary scenes featuring Hannibal and his elephants, she also imagines, beyond the snowy mountains, “the verdant beauty that it would exhibit when the snow should be gone” (164). Contrary to Mme Montoni, what she imagines is never about herself but always implies a sympathy for the pain of others or for their future joy.

4.7. The Aesthetic Imagination and the Possibility of a Community Based on Shared Tastes and Values

The role devoted to imagination in the aesthetic experience of sublimity and beauty in Radcliffe’s novels allows her to develop a political ideal based on common tastes and

values, which might be aligned to some degree with Kant's conception of *sensus communis* developed in *The Critique of Judgment*. The aesthetic experience, for her, not only solicits other humans' consensus about the sublimity or beauty of the scenes before them, taking their potential perspective into account, but also incorporates past events and future ones, thus including more humans in its scope. As we have seen, Emily's aesthetic sensibility with regards to the sublime in nature, rather than confining her to her own inner world, brings her out of herself, into the whole of nature and through time, uniting her to future and past humans, towards whom she feels a deep sympathy. Persons deprived of sensibility, such as Mme Montoni, are indifferent to the sublimity of nature. Instead of imagining the sufferings of past humans and sympathizing with their horrifying experiences, Mme Montoni pleases herself with "contemplating in imagination the splendor of palaces and the grandeur of castles" that she believes she "will be mistress of at Venice and in the Appenine" (166). Indifferent to sublime landscapes and immune to aesthetic sublime emotions, egoists, and ungenerous characters such as Emily's aunt seem to be enclosed in themselves, unable to connect with the nature that surrounds them and to feel for people other than themselves. They fail to use their imagination to widen and open the self to otherness, and to envisage other people's perspective and feelings; they merely speculate about prospects for themselves. Radcliffe makes quite clear through this passage that egoistic, cruel, and ungenerous persons are aesthetically deprived, and that this deficiency is a testimony to their inability to step outside of themselves to imagine what other people might think and feel and therefore to sympathize with them, as explained above. Violent, tyrannical, inhumane, and greedy characters such as Montoni, who cares "little about views of any kind" (171) and who, when exposed to beautiful music, becomes

rapidly “weary of [their] harmony” (185), never feels sympathy toward others. However, even though Montoni, Montalt, and Schedoni are presented as monsters, and therefore as anomalies, their tyrannical and powerful presence warns us that we, as humans, must deal with these sorts of people. How can any appeal to humanity and sympathy ever be successful and effective in the face of such hardened personalities? To put it differently, how can the imagination and aesthetic experience truly empower victims of such passionate despots? The answer to these questions is crucial since it points to the political meaning of aesthetic sensibility and the Gothic.

First, it is important to consider how aesthetic sensibility creates bonds between people and helps construct kinships. For Radcliffe, humans with the potential to be touched by sublime natural scenes, music, and poetry in a way that makes them see the harmony of the world and their place in it, thus expanding their faculties beyond their usual selfish boundaries, tend to befriend and recognize as their fellow companions humans that can feel in the same way. This suggests the existence of a fraternity based on a common sensibility, or of a fellowship of shared aesthetic dispositions and moral values. Through shared aesthetic dispositions, humans can connect with others based on a common way of feeling, a sort of *sensus communis*. For Kant, *sensus communis* is an expression that describes a common way of feeling and judging among humans. It is the ground on which lies our claim that aesthetic judgments can be universal. Thus, *sensus communis* designates a way of judging that demands that we put ourselves in the place of others, seeing things from their perspective, and seeking their agreement through persuasion.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §40, 101-103 (Ak.V, 293-296). For a more detailed discussion of Kant’s conception of *sensus communis*, see also Chapter two, 79-81.

This political dimension of aesthetics is also present in Radcliffe's novels, although, for her, aesthetic sensibility remains more selective, given that, regrettably, not all people are apt to experience these emotions. Still, it retains something of the political sense of Kant's *sensus communis*, because it points to the action of taking sides, of one choosing with whom s/he wants to be friends and the possibility of constructing a *community* based on shared tastes and values. As Hannah Arendt writes of the political meaning of Kant's aesthetics, "By communicating one's feelings, one's pleasures and disinterested delights, one tells one's choices and one chooses one's company" (*Lectures on Kant* 78). It seems, therefore, that a kinship of sentiments can lead to the formation of political community. This community, for Radcliffe, is not to be envisaged as a retreat from the hardships of the world or as an ineffective, idealistic sort of bounding. Moreover, it does not have to compete with an association of villains, because persons deprived of aesthetic sensibility and sympathy, if they can easily recognize each other, are not likely to get along and to unite in a lasting way for the accomplishment of their wrongdoings²⁷⁶ On the contrary, Radcliffe's novels tend to show that once united, such villains very soon separate, diverge, and violently turn against one another, largely because their unity is based on the collusion of selfish interests rather than the common ability to appreciate beauty and sublimity in nature and in art, which render humans able to connect with alterity, that is, with other humans and the whole world.

²⁷⁶ As an example of the fragility and inconsistency of the association of villains, Radcliffe shows in *The Italian* how Schedoni and his former associate, Spalastro, rapidly become enemies when Schedoni abandons his former plan to kill Ellena. Spalastro then feels betrayed, and Schedoni must face the attacks of his former ally. The same happens to Montoni in *The Mystery of Udolpho*, when he refuses to give Emily in marriage to Count Morano, with whom he had an agreement, betraying him because he no longer sees the advantage of the connection. In *The Romance of the Forest*, Montalt is deceived by La Motte, who prefers to let Adeline escape than to kill her, as promised, out of a sudden burst of compassion. These examples demonstrate that, for Radcliffe, associations of villains are based on selfish motives and fear, instead of trust and admiration. Consequently, the fundament of these sorts of association is uncertain and is fatally doomed to fail.

Examples of this sort of kinship between humans, discovered through shared aesthetic tastes, are numerous in Radcliffe's works. They exist between lovers and friends, male and female. It is through their shared admiration of the sublime scenery of the Pyrénées and of the verses of great poets, for instance, that Emily and Valancourt discover similar values and tastes and begin a friendship that later develops into love. Strolling together in Languedoc, Valancourt brings "to her notice the objects that particularly charmed him" and recites "beautiful passages from the Latin and Italian poets as he had heard her admire" (*The Mystery of Udolpho* 42). This communication of mutual tastes in art and nature tends to reveal personal affinities, shared values, and common aesthetic dispositions, leading to more profound attachments. For her part, Adeline, in *The Romance of the Forest*, is naturally attracted to the young Theodore, not only because he saves her from the horrible Marquis, but because of a genuine affinity of taste and sentiment between them. When they have the opportunity to see each other on a more regular basis, "that similarity of taste and opinion, which had at first attracted them, every moment now fully disclosed" (190). Their conversation is "enriched by elegant literature and endeared by mutual regard" (190). Similar kinships and affinities also develop among friends, male or female, as we see in the relationships of Adeline and Clara La Luc, Emily and the lady Blanche, as well as future fathers-in-law and their potential sons-in-law, including M. La Luc and M. Verneuil, and M. de St-Aubert and Valancourt.

When a group of people, sharing the same aesthetic dispositions for sublimity and beauty in nature and art, and possessing a common tendency toward sympathetic feelings for others, are reunited in the same place, the dualistic kinship has the potential to enlarge into a small community. For Radcliffe, what starts as a duo can extend into a village and

foster an entire community, the members of which share aesthetic and moral tastes. This community affords an alternative to violent, tyrannical, and unjust human communities. One can say that it is precisely this sort of alternate community that Radcliffe describes when she talks about La Luc's house and his village in Switzerland in *The Romance of the Forest*. M. Verneuil, a Frenchman who meets La Luc's family by accident and becomes their guest for a time, is delighted by its members, Adeline included. His enthusiasm for La Luc's family and friends is based on a resemblance between his tastes and moral dispositions, and theirs. For him, these new acquaintances correspond to his ideal of humanity. In the house of La Luc, Verneuil meets with "the hospitality, the frankness, and the simplicity, so characteristic of the country" (276-277). For him, "The cheerfulness and harmony" that exist "within the chateau" are "delightful" (277); he also appreciates "the philanthropy which, flowing from the heart of the pastor" (277) spreads "through the whole village" (277), assembling "the inhabitants in the sweet and firm bounds of Paradise" (277). However idealistic, this description of a peaceful, benevolent, and just society is not presented as unrealistic dream, but as a real community based on shared sensibility and values. Of course, the personality of La Luc is fundamental to the realization of this harmonious, happy, and just community. As a pastor, he provides counsel, consolation, and medical aid to the villagers, as well as material necessities to the poor. He possesses, of course, a benevolent heart, but, as Radcliffe insists, he also has a "head" (277). She presents him as a "philosopher" (277), that is, as a person who is able to think for himself and to use his reason to modulate and temper his feelings. In the eighteenth century, to be a philosopher was more relative to an attitude than to a profession. It designated a critical attitude toward superstitions and traditions, and a rational control over one's passions and

feelings. It was a label that could be applied to all humans who showed a tendency toward a rational perspective on life, which was then reflected in the way he/she acted. This rational attitude is described in the *Encyclopédie*, in Dumarsais' famous entry titled "Philosophe":

La raison est à l'égard du philosophe, ce que la grâce est à l'égard du chrétien, *dans le système de Saint Augustin*. La grâce détermine le chrétien à agir; la raison détermine le philosophe *sans lui ôter le goût du volontaire*. Les autres hommes sont emportés par leurs passions, sans que les actions qu'ils font soient précédées de la réflexion: ce sont des hommes qui marchent dans les ténèbres; au lieu que le philosophe dans ses passions mêmes, n'agit qu'après la réflexion; il marche la nuit, mais il est précédé d'un flambeau (509-510).

If this description of the philosopher corresponds to La Luc, it does not apply to passionate characters such as Montoni or Schedoni, because of their lack of reflection and rational restraint. La Luc is also inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who came from Switzerland, and who also valorized the country over the town, while encouraging a simple and frugal life. Verneuil sees him as uniting "the strength of philosophy" with "the finer tenderness of humanity," allowing him to "correct his feelings" and not "annihilate them" (277). We encounter again in this description of La Luc's character, Radcliffe's belief that feeling and sympathy for others must be tempered by reason and judgment in order to be useful.

Many scholars have justly stressed many parallels between La Luc and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.²⁷⁷ Not only were both men from Switzerland, but they were both philosophers who worshipped nature and the country, simplicity, and benevolence, and who were deeply critical of refined civilization and sophisticated manners, such as the ones developed in great towns. Radcliffe seemed to agree with Rousseau on this point. For instance, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, she presents Paris as a place of corruption, disguised malice, and fake sentiments, to which she opposes the pure simplicity of La Vallée, the birthplace of Emily, in Languedoc.²⁷⁸ However, like Rousseau, Radcliffe does not aim to regress to a hypothetical state of nature, but prefers, rather, to envisage the possibility of creating, through a social contract, a just society based not only on shared values and sentiments, but also on common laws. For Rousseau, the social contract unites an atomistic multitude into a collective body of people, whose laws are dictated by the general will of its members.²⁷⁹ If the laws reflect the general will, which is always just and aims at the general good, the people should live in a society where they enjoy equality and freedom. La Luc's village does not embody perfectly what is envisaged here, a just society based on a social contract, because it lacks a constitution, a government, and public assemblies.

²⁷⁷ On the relationships between Ann Radcliffe and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, see Peter Mortensen, "Rousseau's English Daughters: Female Desires and Male Guardianship in British Romantic Fiction"; E.J. Clery, "Ann Radcliffe and D.A.F de Sade: Thoughts on Heroinism"; Angela Right, "How do we Ape thee, France! The Cult of Rousseau in Women's Gothic Writing in the 1790s."

²⁷⁸ In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily's father, M. de St-Aubert, is greatly enchanted by the personality of a young man they have met: Valancourt. He admires his enthusiasm for virtue, his enchantment toward sublime landscapes and his just indignation toward injustice and cruelty. For him, this young man is the perfect picture of an authentic young man uncorrupted by the world and by big cities. For him, it is clear that "This young man has never been at Paris" (41).

²⁷⁹ For Rousseau, to form a political body aiming at the common good, individuals must renounce their former unbound freedom and strength in favor of a common power directed by the general will of its members. This reflects Rousseau's notion of association, evident when he writes, "cet acte d'association produit un corps moral et collectif composé d'autant de membres que l'assemblée a de voix, lequel reçoit de ce même acte son unité, son *moi* commun, sa vie et sa volonté. Cette personne publique qui se forme ainsi par l'union de toutes les autres prenait autrefois le nom de *Cité*, et prend maintenant celui de *République* ou de *corps politique*" (*Du Contrat Social* 52).

However, the many allusions to English law and culture in the conversations between La Luc and Verneuil, indicate that for Radcliffe—and on that subject, she differs radically from Rousseau— England can be considered as a country where this political ideal is at least attempted.²⁸⁰ She tells us that La Luc is “partial to the English,” and that he admires “their character, and the constitution of their laws” (*Romance of the Forest* 261). For his part, M. Verneuil, recognizes the wisdom and justice of English “laws, writings and conversations”(268), despite what he perceives as a certain melancholy attached to the English character. The English people, for Radcliffe, believe in the power of the law, emanating from the people for the common good of society. This reverence for the law explains why, in the Prologue to *The Italian*, an English traveler in Naples is scandalized by the existence of “sanctuaries,” that is, churches or convents, where assassins could have shelter and food without ever being prosecuted and punished by law for their odious deeds. Robert Miles justly remarks in his introduction to *The Italian* that Radcliffe’s choice of the city of Naples to situate a significant part of the narrative is due to its unique, mixed situation in the eighteenth century, where feudal politics coalesced with more modern reforms and where nobles had to face a new rising middle-class. Still, Naples was not entirely ruled under common general laws at this time because other powers, like the Church, with their specific laws, continued to prevail. “Modern states,” he explains, “are distinguished by the uniformity of the law, which applies everywhere, equally, including

²⁸⁰ Rousseau’s strict conception of the general will implies that it cannot be divided into factions or parties whose separate wills are different from the general one. Moreover, the general will cannot be alienated or transferred to a single person. Therefore, no citizen can transfer his voice or his will to another. In this case, representation is illegitimate, and assemblies must imply the participation of all citizens. If only a few members are allowed to decide for all others, the result of their deliberations cannot represent the common will. Therefore, a constitutional monarchy like England divides the general will into parts and concentrates into few citizens the will of all others through representation. For Rousseau, this is not a good system. As he remarks, “Le peuple anglais pense être libre; il se trompe fort, il ne l’est que durant l’élection des membres du parlement; sitôt qu’ils sont élus, il est esclave, il n’est rien” (*Du Contrat Social* 134).

the Church. The feudal state, by contrast, is distinguished by a series of separate and often conflicting powers" (xiii).

4.8. Social Contract, Law, and Justice: Radcliffe's Vision of a Just State

However nostalgic she seems, in certain instances, about medieval customs and values, Radcliffe does not support feudal politics and the power allotted to the catholic church in continental countries such as Italy. In this respect, she remains a defender of the Enlightenment belief in the emancipating power of reason. Much has been said of her political orientations, and whether they should be classified as conservative or liberal.²⁸¹ It is difficult to arrive at a precise picture of her political opinions, because she seems torn between her attachment to England's political institutions and her admiration for Rousseau's republican ideal. Like Burke, she defends England's constitutional monarchy, but she is highly sympathetic to Rousseau's political ideal toward a more just, equal, and free society. When we look more closely into her novels, we observe that the villains and monsters she portrays are all tyrants, insensible to others, proud of what they perceive as their superiority over them, and ready to use any means to obtain their goals, which are usually power and wealth. Such is the case with Schedoni, Montoni, and Montalt, but these are not the kinds of leaders, nor the kinds of societies for which Radcliffe advocates. La Luc represents the antithesis of these monsters, embodying what is, arguably, Radcliffe's ideal. A scene between Emily and Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* illustrates paradigmatically Radcliffe's position about justice, the law, and an ideal political

²⁸¹ David Durant's position about Radcliffe's conservatism and escapism from the revolutionary Gothic has been countered by other critics such as Robert Miles and Rictor Norton, who present her as a progressive political thinker, influenced by Unitarians and Dissenters. They also insist on the political affiliations of her husband, the journalist William Radcliffe, who wrote in a Whig journal, *The English Chronicle*. See David Durant, David, "Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic"; Robert Miles, "Introduction" to *The Italian*; Rick Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho. The Life of Ann Radcliffe*.

community. Facing Montoni, who claims that justice and the law equate, cynically enough, with his own will, Emily has the boldness to contradict him, to assert the superiority of the law and address the differences between Montoni's will and justice as such. The cause of this quarrel originates in Montoni's imperious desire to take from Emily her inheritance, received from her deceased aunt, the former Mme Montoni. Montoni expects no contestation from Emily and is surprised to find her reluctant to give away her property, since, for him, in this affair, "his will was justice" and "she should find it law" (380). For him, she must therefore practice "her duty" (380). This sophistic discourse, which confounds a tyrant's will with justice, is practiced by all Radcliffe's villains and is often presented by them as a higher justice than the one held by the law. It represents the so-called justice of nature; the law of the strongest, who might not even hesitate to kill whoever stands in its way. J.F Clery has keenly remarked that this sort of cynical discourse was also prominent in another Gothic novelist of the time, the Marquis de Sade.²⁸² Surely, this tendency reflects in both Radcliffe and de Sade a deep concern for some features of late eighteenth-century culture. They seem to have perceived how the individualistic, interested and calculating utilitarian subject of the Enlightenment can be tempted to envision his own will as the highest good.²⁸³ Surely, the terror in France and figures such

²⁸² In "Ann Radcliffe and D.A.F de Sade: Thoughts on Heroicism," J. F. Clery argues that while Radcliffe embraces Rousseau's vision of nature as good and benevolent, her villains support a Hobbesian conception of nature as cruel and self-interested. According to him, the same rhetoric of nature's innate violence can be found in Sade's sinister characters. As he remarks, all of Radcliffe's villains claim to be authentic and true and to follow nature instead of social conventions; they realize their true selves "By obeying "the great law of nature," which is a "law of self-preservation as defined by Thomas Hobbes" (205).

²⁸³ In opposition to Shaftesbury, and to Hutcheson's and Rousseau's disinterested conception of morals, utilitarian philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham develop the idea that the emotions of pleasure and pain, which are paramount in our moral evaluation of what is good or bad for us, must be the basis of a rational calculation in order to promote the greatest pleasure and the less pain for all. Despite its altruistic orientation, the utilitarian principle is based on personal interest and on the individual's tendency to seek his own pleasure and to avoid pain. This can easily lead to the idea that one's interest should be satisfied at all costs and through whatever means. See Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.

as Robespierre may incarnate the tyrannical tendencies that lay, dormant, in the Enlightenment dream of a rational society. Therefore, Radcliffe, like Rousseau, strongly suggests that reason might be tempered by sentiment and that the unbridled selfish passions must be limited through the exercise of sympathy for others. The law, in this sense, must arise from the people and not from one's singular will, being thus, something, like what Rousseau would call the "general will," which is rational and aims at the common good, instead of expressing private or corporate interests belonging to factions or groups. This conception of justice as emanating from the law, understood as the public expression of the general will, is clearly expressed in Emily's reply to Montoni, "I am not so ignorant, Signor, of the law on this subject, as to be misled by the assertion of any person. The law, in the present instance, gives me the estates in question, and my own hand shall never betray my right" (381). For Emily, Montoni's will is not the law and cannot pretend to be justice, because of its idiosyncratic, selfish, and passionate origins. If Radcliffe insists on the importance of common tastes, sentiments, and values to form the basis of a political community, she also points to the necessity of the law to embody the general will of its members and to determine their rights. Therefore, having a fundament in the law, Radcliffe's political ideal is not only moral and aesthetical. It can translate itself into a State.

Chapter Five

Literary Irony and Moral Commitment in Jane Austen's Novels

5.1 Irony and Moral Realism in Jane Austen's Novels

Contrary to Ann Radcliffe's novels and to the gothic genre she contributed to develop and consolidate, Jane Austen's novels are decidedly devoid of horrific adventures, dreadful villains, perilous dangers, and threats. Without completely endorsing Mr. Bennet's perspective but probably sharing it to some extent, Jane Austen seems to have perceived life as an interesting spectacle of human silliness and folly, as well as a source of infinite entertainment.²⁸⁴ One does not find in Austen's heroines the poignant sense of alienation and despair that seizes most of Frances Burney's women protagonists. Without ignoring the hopes and disappointments of human life, and the anxieties, sadness, and trials that one must encounter and face, nothing appears in Austen's novels as dramatically and tragically unsolvable as in Burney's novels. Somehow, Austen's characters manage to navigate their worlds, learning and growing morally through their experiences and their interactions with others. My claim is that this departure from the tragic turn of Burney's novels and from the theatrical horrors of Radcliffe's gothic romances is achieved through irony, conceived as a constant awareness of the proximity and distance that exists between fiction and reality, and between imagination and fact, and by a real interest in moral action, moral progress, and sympathetic receptivity to others. For Austen, irony is necessary to distance oneself from the constructions of the imagination or of fiction, but it is also required to question and doubt the matter-of-factness of supposed "real" life. Therefore, Austen's irony is directed both towards the works of the imagination and towards what appears as

²⁸⁴ In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's father, Mr. Bennet, famously exclaims, after having received the report (from the comical and absurd Mr. Collins) of Darcy's intention to marry his daughter Elizabeth, "For what do we live, but to make sport of our neighbors, and laugh at them in our turn?" (Austen 399). This sentence illustrates his ironical attitude towards life and his tendency to take nothing very seriously.

factual or real. In a novel such as *Northanger Abbey*, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, reality and fiction, and fact and imagination, are set in opposition to and distanced from each other, but they also overlap and interact in a way that invites the reader to be constantly aware of the intimate connection between them. As I will demonstrate, this novel seems to teach us two inseparable things: first, that we should not take imaginary thoughts, or fictions too seriously, and secondly, that reality would be indecipherable without them.²⁸⁵

But Austen is also a moralist, and a very fine one, as many philosophers have recognized. Her interest in morality and the cultivation of virtues appears as the second important reason why she refuses to dissipate the reality of the world or to imbue it with nightmarish, hallucinating traits. For her, the world seems to be the place where humans must act, make difficult choices, reflect on their actions and those of others, and develop moral excellencies or virtues. Moreover, humans are bound to respond to other people's sufferings and joys, and, therefore, to understand their points of view, and eventually modify their own. In other words, Austen seems to suggest that we must believe in the reality of the world, because we are compelled to act in it in the best way possible, to sympathize with others, and to confront our personal perceptions by looking at them alongside theirs. What I would like to demonstrate—primarily through an analysis of Austen's last novel, *Persuasion*—is that it is through moral judgment and moral action, as

²⁸⁵ The relationship between fiction and reality has preoccupied many philosophers throughout the twentieth century. In addition to those already mentioned in chapter two (section 2.3, 95-105), the subject has been considered by philosophers such as Avrom Fleishman, Roman Ingarden, Susanne Langer, Käte Hamburger, and Jacques Derrida. In *Fiction and the Ways of Knowing*, Avrom Fleishman affirms that the locus of fiction lies “in the shifting combinations of the known and the unknown, the real and the imaginary” (7). This characterization of fiction seems particularly relevant to what Austen does in *Northanger Abbey*. On this subject, see also Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work*, Susanne Langer, *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures*; Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

well as through a process of self-education or self-formation, that the world and others cease to be experienced as indefinitely remote things and obstacles for the individual self.

This claim is closely linked with what I term, in chapter three, the philosophical predicament of modernity, that is, the gap between subjective representations and the world as it objectively exists. As seen in chapter three, the opposition between the self and the world produces a sense of alienation, one that is not only felt at a metaphysical and epistemological level, but also experienced socially and politically. Radcliffe's and Burney's heroines are indeed often unable to fit into rigid social categories and must endure social threats, rejections, and alienations. My contention is that Austen reduces and relativizes the opposition between the self and the world through her use of irony, and by returning repeatedly to the moral necessity of believing in the existence of the world and others. This moral belief in the world, although not explicitly articulated, recalls the position defended by eighteenth-century contemporary German philosophers such as Jacobi and Fichte, who, despite important differences, proclaimed their faith in the existence of the world.²⁸⁶ Even if Jacobi completely rejects Fichte's commitment to transcendentalism and its subjective construction of the world and embraces, on the contrary, a philosophical realism that induces him to believe in the world as it appears to

²⁸⁶ The debate between J.G. Fichte and F.H. Jacobi arose after the former's publication of *The Doctrine of Science* in 1794-95. Following the Pantheism Controversy, started by Jacobi's publication of *The Spinoza Letters* in 1785, the debate concerns the dangers of extreme rationalism, which for Jacobi, must necessarily lead to determinism, nihilism, and the negation of freedom and religious faith. If Jacobi's first target was Spinoza's materialism, he came to see in Fichte's philosophy a reversed Spinozism, that is, a spiritual determinism according to which the world is only the construction of the transcendental subject, that is, a dream, without any concrete reality. He denounces the nihilism and atheism of Fichte in *The Open Letter to Fichte* in 1799. The latter replies to Jacobi's critique in a work published the same year, *The Vocation of Man*. Without embracing Jacobi's religious faith, Fichte nonetheless recognizes in this work that human knowledge cannot prove the existence of the world, and that only the moral law, understood in the Kantian manner, induces a necessary belief in the world. See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, Book III, 113-198. About Jacobi's argument against Lessing's Spinozism, see Marceline Morais, "Jacobi et la querelle du panthéisme. Le rationalisme et la philosophie en question."

the senses, both conclude that the existence of the outside world cannot be demonstrated but only believed in. They agree, in short, that the objectivity of the external world cannot be proven rationally, and that one is, nonetheless, compelled to believe in its existence. For Fichte, influenced by Kant, this belief is commanded by moral duty, which orders us to act in the world according to the moral law. Jacobi, for his part, does not refer to a moral point of view or to a putative moral law. His position is rather religious. However, he accuses the rationalist view of begetting nihilism, which is a peril for both morality and freedom. Even though Austen probably did not read contemporary German philosophers such as Fichte and Jacobi, she seems to have shared their common preoccupation with modern rationalism and to have sought a moral solution. Contrary to them, however, she writes in a literary tradition—one might say, a women's literary tradition—where the challenges are not Spinoza's determinism or Kant's constructivism, but Frances Burney's strong sense of dissociation and Ann Radcliffe's escapist tendencies through the imagination and romantic visions. Her novelistic response to these women authors is comprised of a mixture of literary irony and down-to-earth moral realism, according to which we have no choice but to posit that the world exists, because others and the world are to be dealt with on a daily basis, while also being aware of the proximity that exists between the real and the imagined. I propose to explore, first, the workings of irony and the relationships between fiction, imagination, and reality in *Northanger Abbey*, and secondly, to analyze Austen's moral belief in the reality of the world and others in *Persuasion*. If a lot has already been said about Jane Austen's position concerning women's education and their social and economic position in the world, as well as concerning the philosophical and ethical dimension of her

novels,²⁸⁷ no one has envisaged her work in a sequence with those of Ann Radcliffe and Frances Burney around one single important problematic, that is, the modern self and its capacity to reach to the world and others.²⁸⁸ In this sense, my analysis of *Northanger Abbey* offers original views about Austen's conception of fiction and imagination as means to connect with reality and to know the inner motives of others. Her proximity with Hume and Kant's conception of the imagination and its epistemological status have not yet been explored. While the connection of her novels with Smith's moral theory and her engagement with virtue ethics have been already noticed by critics and philosophers, it has never been envisaged as a response to the philosophical problems of the modern self.

5.2 Reality, Fiction, and the Workings of Irony in *Northanger Abbey*

Northanger Abbey, one of the first novels written by Austen,²⁸⁹ employs to some degree the humoristic tone and highly ironic posture of the *Juvenilia*.²⁹⁰ It is often regarded, and

²⁸⁷Many critics have written about Jane Austen's position regarding the social and political place of women during the late eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. While some presented her as a proto feminist alongside Mary Wollstonecraft, others have contested this perspective and presented her as very conservative as to her views about women. See Edna Steeves, "Pro-Feminism in some Eighteenth-Century Novels"; Lloyd Brown, "Jane Austen and the Feminist Tradition"; Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*; Margaret Kirkcham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*; and Claudia C. Johnson, *Jane Austen, Women, Politics and the Novels*. Austen's engagement with Enlightenment philosophy and virtue ethics has been also remarked in works such as Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*; Mimi Martucci (ed), *Jane Austen and Philosophy*; Gilbert Ryle, "Jane Austen and the Moralists"; Sarah Emsley, *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the virtues*; Christel Fricke, "The Challenge of *Pride and Prejudice*: Adam Smith and Jane Austen on Moral Education"; and Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue*.

²⁸⁸In the introduction, I explain why I have chosen to envisage these three novelists in a sequence which bespeaks of their common concern with similar problems. The affinities between these three women novelists have been suggested to me by Jane Austen herself in *Northanger Abbey*. See Introduction, 31-32.

²⁸⁹Austen wrote a work titled "Susan," which would eventually become *Northanger Abbey*, around the years 1798-99. The novel was completed and sent to a publisher around 1803. Other manuscripts that would become *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* already existed, but they were not complete and ready for publication at the time. "Susan" was accepted by the publisher Crosby but was never published. Austen was forced to repurchase it in 1816. However, the novel was published only posthumously, by her brother Henry, in 1817.

²⁹⁰Austen's *Juvenilia* were written during her teenage years, between approximately 1786 and 1793. They are separated into three volumes and mostly characterized by their comical turn and parodies of popular works, such as novels, notably those of Samuel Richardson; of history books, such as Oliver Goldsmith's schoolroom textbook, *The History of England* (4 vols, 1771); and of essays written by authors such as Joseph Addison and Samuel Johnson. Her tales are expressionist and unrestrained, full of exaggerated sentiments

not erroneously, as a parody of gothic novels.²⁹¹ This parodic stance enables the reader to reflect on the relationships between fiction and reality. However, contrary to Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*,²⁹² Austen's purpose in this novel is not to denounce the pernicious influence of romances and other imaginary fictions on the poor weak minds of women, and to make fun of gullible characters, but rather to look attentively at the resemblances and differences between reality and fiction, and at the interplays of the imagination and sense perception. As some scholars have observed,²⁹³ in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen uses the novel form to defend the genre against its detractors. Even if she advocates for a more sober and realistic novel form, she does not dismiss the relevance of

and impossible adventures. Her heroines are generally bold, independent, and willful. *Northanger Abbey* partakes of their parodic turn, and one can recognize in Isabella Thorpe a type similar to the adventurous coquettes of Austen's *Juvenilia*.

²⁹¹ Regarding parody and burlesque in *Northanger Abbey*, see Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, Chap.II, 56-58; Henry Rogers, "Of Course, You Can Trust Me!" Jane Austen's Narration in *Northanger Abbey*"; Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art*, 59-64; Lloyd Wellesley Brown, *Bits of Ivory*, 217; Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen. Women, Politics and the Novel*, 34; Katrin Ristkok Burlin, "The Pen of the Contriver": The Four Fictions of *Northanger Abbey*," 89-111.

²⁹²Charlotte Lennox's popular novel, *The Female Quixote*, published in 1757, which earned the praise of famous writers and critics such as Samuel Johnson and Henry Fielding, also features a young woman whose judgment is corrupted by the reading of fantastic and unrealistic romances. Arabella, the protagonist of this novel, appears to be much more intoxicated by the fantastic realm of romances than Catherine Morland. She is often unable to distinguish reality from fiction and behaves constantly in an unrealistic and theatrical manner. When she falls ill and is told by a doctor that all her interpretations of reality are false and imaginary, she changes her mind entirely, marries her cousin and fiancé, and ceases to dream of fantastic and dramatic adventures. The impetuous and imperious Arabella is somehow humbled and seems to abide to the authority of men. It is hard to know if Charlotte Lennox really preconize women's obedience and discourages heroism on their part. The novel is ambiguous; but it surely can be interpreted that way. Even if Charlotte Lennox does not reprove all works of fiction— after all, she is a novelist herself — but rather a specific form of fiction called romance, she really seems to advise caution when it comes to this latter sort of fiction, which lacking the novel's verisimilitude, encourages false beliefs about the world. In *Northanger Abbey*, Gothic Romances are not altogether condemned but gently mocked, and Catherine never surrenders to male judgment. On the contrary, the novel ends with Catherine's awareness of the rightfulness of her judgment about General Tilney's character. There is no ambiguity about that: the naïve and simple Catherine is proven right in the end.

²⁹³ If *Northanger Abbey* mocks gently the exaggerations and dramatizations of Gothic novels, it is nevertheless a novel in which one finds a strong defense of the genre and where the author points at the prejudices of men and women, who pretend to be ashamed of reading novels and boast of more serious readings. Many critics have underlined the convergence between parodic and apologetic intentions regarding novels in *Northanger Abbey*. See Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen. Women, Politics and the Novel*, 48; Rachel M. Brownstein, *Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice in The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, 36-37; Claire Grogan, *Introduction of Northanger Abbey*, 17-18.

gothic romances entirely. My claim is that *Northanger Abbey* is not only a parody of gothic romances, but also a tribute to them and a defense of fiction, notably of novels written by women. As Claudia Johnson justly remarks, “parodies are acknowledgments of respect, as well as acts of criticism” (48). One does not simply imitate what he or she does not, in some respect, admire. From this perspective, if *Northanger Abbey* can be seen as a criticism of the unrealistic exaggerations of Ann Radcliffe’s most famous novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, it remains nonetheless a tribute to that novel.²⁹⁴ The novel is itself a commentary on novels and on their remarkable contribution to our understanding of human life, even when they display sentimental or gothic extravagances. Referring exclusively to British women novelists, among which figure prominent novels such as *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, or *Belinda*,²⁹⁵ Jane Austen affirms that the novel, as a genre, displays “the greatest powers of the mind” (60). For her, novels reveal “the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humor” (60). This novelistic panegyric concludes with a reference to the high literary value of the novel, which is written “in the best chosen language” (60). Austen’s famous statement about novels in *Northanger Abbey* has a peculiar quality, which attracts the attention of the reader. The defense she makes of the novel is not part of the discourse of any character and does not belong to the narrative. On the contrary, it interrupts the action and reveals the

²⁹⁴ It has been remarked that while Catherine reads *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in the novel, Austen seems much more influenced in her parodic imitation by other novels by Ann Radcliffe, such as *A Sicilian Romance* or *The Romance of the Forest*. See Grogan 18. I do not contest the influence of these novels on Austen’s treatment of Gothic conventions, particularly when she alludes to familiar Gothic topics, devices and mechanisms, but the novel nevertheless insists on making a parallel between *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Northanger Abbey*, even if the two stories do not necessarily overlap, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* remaining the map through which Catherine tries to guide herself in the meanders of adult life.

²⁹⁵ *Cecilia; or Memoirs of an Heiress* is Frances Burney’s second novel, published in 1782; *Camilla; or a Picture of Youth* is Burney’s third novel, published in 1796; and *Belinda* is a novel written by Maria Edgeworth, and published in 1801.

author's decisive point of view about the subject. This personal intervention of the author in a work of fiction shakes, for a moment, the reader's belief in the reality of what he is reading and calls his/her attention to the pervasive presence of the author, as a sort of *deus ex machina*. While the importance of novels for Austen calls for her personal intervention in her own fictional work, it also points ironically to the fictitiousness of the narrative, which is, after all, as fictive as the Gothic romances it mocks.

Austen's defense of novels in *Northanger Abbey* is closely related to her investigation of the relationships between reality and fiction, which relies on the use of irony.²⁹⁶ Austen's ironic perspective serves to unsettle our convictions about the differences and resemblances between reality and fiction, and about the separation between what we think and imagine, and the world outside our minds. As I will demonstrate, Austen makes us wonder if what we are reading is or is not a Gothic novel, if what Catherine thinks is real, or imaginary, or both, and if the story is merely a fictitious construct, or if it captures something of the real world. The ultimate irony resides perhaps at the end of the novel, when the reader is invited to decide whether the novel recommends "parental tyranny" (240) or "filial disobedience" (240). Not only do these values contradict each other but the narrator seems to renounce her commanding status in favor of the reader, while revealing at the same time that she may not know herself what the primary message of her novel in fact is. This constant ironic

²⁹⁶ For Marvin Mudrick, irony is a central feature of Austen's literary works. It allows her to distance herself from the subject and from her readers, and to remain disengaged and non-committal. He sees irony as a personal defense, but also as a means to investigate humans and make discoveries about them. Only a neutral and disengaged irony on the part of the narrator can enable the reader to see the oppositions between "man as he is and man as he aspires to be" (Mudrick 20). Mudrick argues that Austen's irony can assume multiple forms that develop over the course of her writing career. For him, in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's irony is somehow excessive and overly explicit; it lacks the subtlety of her subsequent works where the author does not always intrude, as a narrator, to express her distance from her work, and where the characters appear less "functional" (Mudrick 75) and have more psychological depth. I do agree with him about the irony in *Northanger Abbey*. It is far more obviously and less subtly employed than in other Austen's works. However, that is what makes that novel so clear and incisive; it is also what makes it so amusing.

distance between the narrator and her work, and between narrative and reality, result in the impossibility for *Northanger Abbey* to appear as a fully dramatic, pathetic, or scary novel. Due to Austen's persistent use of irony, no character in the novel can be elevated to a majestic, awful, horrific, or splendid status. There is, in brief, no place for such sentiments as the sublime and the beautiful in *Northanger Abbey*. The register is in a lower key. Everything is somewhere "in-between" and falls short of romantic expectations, while remaining somehow not so distant from them.

The heroine of *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland, is presented to the reader, at the beginning of the novel, as an anti-heroine, that is, as a character that fails to meet the standards of perfection consistent with the ideal Gothic heroine. Austen's intention in challenging, from the very outset, her heroine's capacity to be a heroine is multifariously ironic. First, it reminds us that we are reading a work of fiction and that Catherine is a fictitious person constructed into a heroine; second, it suggests that real ordinary persons would rarely meet the high standards of gothic heroinism, and that, in the case of Catherine, the clash between the ideal she is supposed to incarnate and what she really is constant and confusing; and third, that however distant Catherine is from the perfect ideal of a gothic heroine, she remains nevertheless the heroine of this novel, and is expected as such to experience at least some adventures, however lame or ordinary. Austen's parodic intention is aptly displayed in her depiction of Catherine's remoteness from literary standards of heroinism. Contrary to Emily in the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, her infancy does not announce any qualities by which she could be envisaged as a potential heroine, being rather boyish, plain, uninterested in learning, unable to play a musical instrument decently, and deprived of any particular gift for drawing. She is slow and distracted in her lessons, hates

“confinement and cleanliness” (39), and prefers “cricket, base-ball, riding on horse-back, and running about the country” (39) over reading. With frequent exclamations such as “What a strange, unaccountable character!” (39), or “This was strange indeed!” (41), the narrator intrusively informs the reader that her main character does not conform to the conventions of gothic narrative and that she, rather, resembles the majority of English middle-class country girls of that time (and perhaps also the reader herself). Even if common eighteenth-century girls do not look like heroines of romance, it does not prevent some of them from fancying themselves as such. Austen reminds us that they might not be so very remote from the truth, because common reality does resemble, sometimes, the best of fiction. That is why the novel tends to demonstrate that ordinary girls might sometimes be regarded as heroines of fiction. After all, adventures can also happen in ordinary life and involve regular people, who are neither saintly nor villainous. Consequently, Austen’s ironic strategy in *Northanger Abbey* consists in the superposition of two genres: a parody of gothic romances and a realistic novel of manners.²⁹⁷

If Austen’s irony points constantly to the discrepancy between the life of real ordinary people, and the idealistic and extraordinary existence of Gothic characters, she also points to the frequent points of convergence between these two groups. In making these sorts of parallels, she does not diverge significantly from the common perception people had at this time in England with regards to literary characters and their relationship to real life. According to Mary Lascelles, eighteenth-century readers perceived many similarities between “the world of illusion” (55) and “the actual world” (55). According to her, people would refer to characters in novels as if they were real and make comparisons

²⁹⁷ On this subject, see Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, 57.

between them and people that they knew well, as if the two worlds intersected.²⁹⁸ In *Northanger Abbey*, the relationship between the world of fiction and the real world is rather complex, because the two worlds are presented simultaneously as opposed and connected. While “gothic and romance conventions are displaced, exposed as illusory” (Rogers 2), they remain at the same time “possible, through the ambiguous, indeterminate bound between illusion and reality” (2). The young Catherine, who, as we have seen, does not correspond to the ideal depiction of a Gothic romance heroine and is therefore playfully represented as an anti-heroine, a regular common girl of no particular interest, is nevertheless to experience the tribulations of a love story and an encounter with a villain; she will even visit an old Abbey, exactly as if she were living a Gothic adventure.

Catherine’s dull and uneventful life is soon replaced by a more heroic one, as her neighbors, the Allens, decide to take her with them to Bath. At this point, the quiet normal life of Catherine is about to take a more Romanesque turn. Even if going to Bath must have been usual for many young girls belonging to the country gentry in this period, Austen transforms this ritual into a potential source of adventure, an ordinary fabric into which one may cut fictional shapes. As common as Catherine’s journey may appear, the narrator warns us that “Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way” (Austen, *Northanger Abbey* 41). Ironically, the dull and insignificant Mrs. Allen is invested with an improbable design by this same narrator, who imputes to her the thought that “if adventures

²⁹⁸ This eighteenth-century custom of comparing fictional characters with real ones takes its roots in the pretention that novels had to be “true to life” and realistic. Novelists often claimed that novels were even closer to reality than history. Some famous eighteenth-century novelists presented their works as “histories” rather than novels, to distinguish them from romances, examples include Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones: a Foundling* (1749) and Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722). For further readings on the complex relationships of novels and history in the eighteenth-century, see Nicholas D. Paige, *Technologies of the Novel*, Chapter one; Karen O’Brien, “History and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century Britain”; J.P Hunter, *Before Novels, The Cultural Context of Eighteenth-century Fiction*.

will not befall a young lady in her own village, she must seek them abroad” (42). Of course, poor Mrs. Allen thinks nothing of the sort—all she can think about are muslins, gowns, and ribbons—but the narrator ironically makes her an unwilling agent of destiny, a device contrived by the novelist to bring about the sequence of extraordinary events that will make the life of Catherine of some literary interest. However, going to Bath for a young girl of fifteen who had never left her village is indeed a little adventure and it may reasonably bring an encounter with a potential lover. The difference, then, between real life and fiction may lay in the degree or the intensity of the events and emotions experienced by the heroine, as well as in the personality and deeds of the villain or the hero. This is why Austen will intentionally tone them down, attenuating fictional types in accordance with something closer to real life. This toning down of fictional types and gothic conventions is, of course, a source of burlesque, as Mary Lascelles rightly notes; this produces an ironic distance between the world of gothic conventions and the world of real life,²⁹⁹ as Marvin Murdoch contends,³⁰⁰ but it also shows how strangely close these two worlds finally are. Therefore, the constant diminishment of extravagant Gothic conventions to the level of more ordinary life, reveals both the distance and the proximity between reality and fiction.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen demonstrates how the types and conventions of Gothic fiction, however grandiloquent and disproportionate they might appear when applied to reality, can also constitute a useful lens through which one may read and interpret real life.³⁰¹ For instance, General Tilney, the father of Henry, the young man with whom

²⁹⁹ See Mary Lascelles, *Jane Austen and her Art*, 59.

³⁰⁰ See Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, 56-57.

³⁰¹ Claudia L. Johnson makes a similar claim when she affirms that “the alarms of romances” are a canvas onto which the “anxieties of common life” can be projected “in illuminating, rather than distorting ways” (35). She goes on to assert that if Austen dismisses the alarms arising from “stock gothic machinery” (35), she takes rather seriously the alarms concerning the central Gothic figure of the tyrannical father.

Catherine falls in love, is not a very sympathetic character. His person, although handsome and imposing, can also be frightful and menacing. Catherine's understanding of his character is progressive, and the novel gradually discloses to us how, guided by her reading of Radcliffe's novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Catherine constructs him, in her mind, into a Gothic villain. Having discovered *The Mysteries of Udolpho* at her arrival in Bath, Catherine becomes acquainted with the style and conventions of gothic novels and begins to perceive characters and events according to a Gothic grid. The typology of Gothic villains certainly helps Catherine to identify General Tilney as a villain, but in doing so, she is not altogether hypnotized by Gothic literary patterns. The constitution of the General's villainous identity is not a pure fantasy and cannot be dismissed as entirely delusional, because it depends on the accumulation of facts, which Catherine has witnessed herself or that were reported to her by her friend Eleanor. Austen minutely describes the process through which Catherine's observations, reflections, and imaginary thoughts lead her to be persuaded of the evil nature of General Tilney. If some of her conclusions about General Tilney tend towards the highly exaggerated, the novel shows that not all of them are entirely disconnected from reality. While the narrator and Henry Tilney seem to suggest that gothic novels are the cause of Catherine's wildest surmises, I would like to demonstrate that it is not what the novel as a whole implies, and it is probably not the author's opinion. In order to do so, I will summarize briefly the progression of her thoughts.

Before the General invites her to the Abbey, Catherine feels nothing but awe and respect for his haughty and domineering deportment. She does not know him very well.

Consequently, she believes that Austen turns "her power of parody to a saliently politicized form" (35). I do not contest that Austen's parodic intent in *Northanger Abbey* may have political resonance, but I am personally more interested in the philosophical reflection it provides on the complex relationships between fiction and reality.

When he invites her to the Abbey, she has the opportunity to study his personality more closely. His way of regimenting everybody, and monopolizing conversation, makes her begin to suspect him of being a sort of despot. His children obviously fear him, and he does not show them any kind of affection. Eleanor's revelations about her deceased mother tend to increase Catherine's growing opinion of the General as a villain. When the General offers to take Catherine on a tour of the gardens, he refuses to follow Eleanor and Catherine into what Eleanor describes to Catherine as her late mother's favorite path. This strange behavior leads Catherine to conclude that if "He did not love her walk: —could he therefore have loved her?" (185). She also learns that Eleanor's father refused to hang his deceased wife's portrait in the drawing-room, because of a supposed lack of likeness, and has relegated the portrait to a place where nobody can see it. This behavior shocks Catherine greatly and she becomes more and more convinced that the General's wife was unhappy and that he was cruel to her. She reasons thus: "A portrait—very like—of a departed wife, not valued by the husband! — He must have been dreadfully cruel to her!" (181). These surmises on the part of Catherine have the effect of transforming her previous fear of the General into positive aversion. For her, there is no doubt about his being a sort of villain.

If Catherine has not yet transformed the General into a murderer, her reasoning already appears to the reader a little bit precipitous and not entirely grounded. Austen instils these doubts by making Catherine use particular words or expressions that are generally associated with the idea of a strong conviction, based on solid proofs. For instance, because of what she has personally witnessed or of what was reported to her by Eleanor, she is "persuaded" (181), that General Tinley was "certainly" (181) a bad husband. The General's disregard for his wife's portrait is therefore "another proof" (191) of his evil

character. Finally, Catherine is forced to conclude that he “must” (181) have been cruel to her. These words carry a strong conviction of the necessity and validity of Catherine’s reasoning, while the actual elements of proof seem to authorize only suppositions and probabilities. To explain the rapidity with which Catherine seems to jump to conclusions about General Tilney, the narrator alludes to the fact that Catherine has “often read about such characters, which Mr. Allen had been used to call unnatural and overdrawn” (181). The same sort of depreciation of the veracity and reality of characters drawn in Gothic novels and of their potential pernicious influence over naïve minds, is made by Henry Tilney, when he learns that Catherine suspects his father of having murdered his mother. In a way similar to Mr. Allen’s, he scolds and shames her for her delirious surmises, assuring her that her father has been very much affected by her mother’s death and that she should be aware that “charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe’s works” (197), “it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the Midlands counties of England, was to be looked for” (197). For Henry Tilney, England is a country, contrary to Italy and the south of France, where murder is “not tolerated” (197) because the laws and the customs of the country assure the security of its citizens. Moreover, if in Mrs. Radcliffe’s Italian imaginary settings there are “no mixed characters” (197), Henry affirms that in England there is in each person an “unequal mixture of good and bad” (197-98). In this prominent example of eighteenth-century men’s condescension towards women, the credulous heroine is shamed for having entertained fanciful surmises about respectable ordinary persons, but also to have confounded England with more barbarous countries and, what is probably worse, to have failed to recognize the difference between reality and fiction.

However, as many scholars have observed, Catherine's suspicions, if they are indeed exaggerated, are not totally unfounded when it comes to the real character of General Tilney.³⁰² He may not be, as Catherine had thought, the exact reproduction of "a Montoni!" (186), because he certainly does not share the latter's extremity of cruelty and violence—being as Henry explained, bound by the laws of his country, and influenced by its culture— but he certainly is, as selfish, cruel, greedy, and heartless as an Englishman of his time can be. His true nature reveals itself at the end of the novel, when, having realized that Catherine is not the rich heiress he had supposed her to be, he turns her out of doors without explication or proper notice, and sends her alone on a long journey back home in a carriage with neither protection nor money. If Catherine is wrong to conclude on the basis of insufficient evidence that General Tilney had murdered his wife, the novel indicates that she is nonetheless right about everything else: General Tilney must not have been a good and caring husband, his wife was probably unhappy, and he does, in fact, possess some of Montoni's traits, notably selfishness, greed, and cruelty. That is why, after having been ashamed of herself when scolded by Henry for her delirious imaginings, Catherine finally concludes that "in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty" (236). This admission on the part of Catherine is certainly to be interpreted as the affirmation of the correctness of her own judgment, in contrast to Henry's.³⁰³ It also testifies to the fact that

³⁰² See Caroline L. Johnson, *Jane Austen. Women, Politics and the Novel*, 40-41; Henry Rogers, "Of Course, You Can Trust Me!"; 3; Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, 111.

³⁰³ One cannot but recognize in Catherine's final approbation of her own judgment feminist undertones and, as Claudia L. Johnson observes, an overt critique of "paternal authority" (41). Johnson judiciously asserts herself against a tradition of scholars who understand *Northanger Abbey* as a mere parody aiming at "debunking gothic conventions" (34), and advocates for a reading of the novel as painting a "common sense world of the ordinary" (34). In this way, according to her, *Northanger Abbey* "does not refute, but rather clarifies and reclaims, gothic conventions in distinctly political ways" (34).

gothic novels, instead of having altered her judgment, may have rendered her more perceptive with regards to evil and malevolent persons, as I will demonstrate below. What I would like to point out, however, is the way in which Austen, in *Northanger Abbey*, engages in an important reflection about the role of the imagination in the constitution of knowledge and about the relationship between fiction and reality. In doing so, she participates in an important eighteenth-century debate about the origins and limits of knowledge. My intention is to show the proximity of her analysis with that of eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume's theories concerning the role of the imagination in the formation of probable reasoning. I will demonstrate how she completes Hume's account of "fiction" by a recourse to an aesthetic understanding of the term, which presents some affinities with Emmanuel Kant's influential conception of genius.

5.3 Hume, Kant, and Austen on the Role of the Imagination in the Constitution of Knowledge and the Function of Fiction in the Process of Learning

David Hume and Immanuel Kant were interested, as Locke was before them, in the genesis of human knowledge, as well as in the demarcation between what we can know with certitude and what we cannot determine with equal certitude, and which, therefore, goes beyond our power of knowing. Each were, in a way, interested in the relationships between our concepts or ideas and the data of sense perceptions, which can also be understood as the relationship between our subjective mental representations and the objects related to them in the outside world. The problem raised by the seemingly different nature of our concepts or ideas and that of the external objects they represent, recalls what I termed, in chapter three, the "modern predicament."³⁰⁴ Despite the differences between

³⁰⁴ In chapter three, I summarize what I call "The modern predicament" as being "the impossibility to coincide with the world, to ourselves and to connect with others, because of our subjective estrangement from them and of the limits of our power of knowing" (154).

Hume's and Kant's methods and approaches, they both attribute to the imagination an important role in the solution of this problem, assuming a definitive solution can actually be envisaged. Contrary to his rationalist predecessors, like Descartes, Hume did not believe that such a thing as a faculty of pure intellect, comprising pure a priori ideas, could exist. Following Locke, he believed that all ideas are images or copies of sense impressions.³⁰⁵ Since the imagination is the faculty of images, it follows, for him, that our ideas are the product of the imagination, which is therefore promoted as a central faculty of cognition. To avoid confusion, it is important to note that the imagination for Hume possesses one broad and inclusive sense, as the faculty of images, and another, more specific sense, that is reserved to fiction and mere fancies.³⁰⁶ For him, our ideas, conceived as faint copies of vivid and lively impressions, can be divided by the broad, inclusive imagination into more simple units, or combine with others to form more complex ones. Based on these ideas, the inclusive imagination can make associations between them, thus forming some probable reasonings relative to the objects that these ideas represent. According to Hume, the basic rules of association are resemblance, contiguity, and causality.³⁰⁷ However, the ideas that we have and the associations that we make between

³⁰⁵ Hume makes this clear at the beginning of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, when he writes that: "Those perceptions which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions" (11), while ideas are "the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning" (11).

³⁰⁶ Hume remarks that the imagination is not bound to reproduce an original impression like memory and can therefore produce fantastic and unseen creatures such as "winged horses, fiery dragons and monstrous giants" (15). Yet, the imagination is an important cognitive faculty because it has the power to divide simple ideas and reunite them to form others, which operations are necessary to our thinking process. If the free activity of the imagination can be the source of fanciful fictions, Hume assures us that it nevertheless follows most of the time upon some universal rules of association, which prevent its free creative activity from causing too much harm to our reasoning. Hume therefore points to "a uniting principle among ideas" (15) that functions as a "gentle force, which commonly prevails" (15) and instructs our imagination as to which simple ideas "are the more proper to be united in a complex one" (15). Therefore, for Hume, the imagination is at the center of our reasoning because it is at the source of the associations we make between ideas and of the combination of simple ones into complex ones, but as a free faculty, it can also depart from the common rules of the human mind and create "fictions" and fanciful reasonings.

³⁰⁷ See Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 15-16.

them can be different with regards to force, liveliness, and strength. Those which possess these qualities are the ones we really believe in, and they are called, consequently, “beliefs.” What generally gives to an idea this quality of liveliness that makes it into a belief is its association with an impression. Therefore, we may conclude that for Hume the ideas that are most founded or grounded are the ones that can be associated with an actual impression.

However, a great part of our beliefs for Hume are related to matters of facts and arise from what he calls *probable reasoning*.³⁰⁸ Most such probable reasonings are based on the relation of causality. As a principle of association, causality designates the association of two ideas or of an idea with an impression, as cause and effect, on the basis of the experience, registered in our memory, of their repeated succession. For instance, when one billiard ball hits another, we infer from that impression that it will cause the other to move in a certain direction, even if we have not yet actually observed this effect. This reasoning is probable because matters of fact are not ideal mathematical entities and remain therefore contingent on our ideas and reasonings. After all, the billiard ball could move differently than what we have always observed, or it may not even move at all. However, some probable reasonings are more persuasive than others because they are grounded on “impressions” that are memorized or observed. If the causal connection implies no relation to any sort of impression, it is fictitious and improbable. Thus, probability for Hume arises from a relationship between “impressions of our memory and senses” (55) and “our ideas” (55). If there is “no mixture of any impression in our probable reasonings, the conclusion would be entirely chimerical” (55). Yet not all impressions have the same degree of

³⁰⁸ On probable reasonings, see Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 47-57.

vivacity. While some induce only a weak adherence, others induce a real belief. The ones which create in us a belief in their veracity are the ones which are felt more strongly. Direct impressions, as well as recent memories, create vivid and strong beliefs in their veracity. Ideas and old memories are less vivid in our minds and seem weaker. Therefore, they do not induce strong beliefs. To believe or not in a probable reasoning seems to depend uniquely on the force of the impression which underlies it. Consequently, what distinguishes a purely fictitious association between two different ideas or between an idea and a given fact, resides in “the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind” (Hume 60). Still, it is not always easy to separate mere fictions from probable reasonings and sound beliefs. The problem rests on the subjective criteria offered by Hume. If every assent relies in feeling, it is not impossible for a pure creation of the imagination to acquire the force and vivacity of a real impression, “counterfeit[ing] its effects on the belief and judgment” (53). Hume evokes the case of liars who repeat their lies since they become themselves convinced of their veracity. We can extend this example to the case of people who read so many “fictions” that they may acquire the feeling of their reality. Consequently, the problem with probable reasoning relates to its subjective ground, which evokes the possibility that all these reasonings turn out to be mere *fictions*. However, Hume maintains that everything that the imagination conceives remains at least *possible*. The fact that there is not a correlative impression to prove it does not entirely dismiss the idea produced by the imagination as false or unreal. Therefore, what he calls a fiction is possible and as such it can have a certain cognitive dimension. As Hume says, “to form a clear idea of anything, is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any demonstration against it” (55).

As an English writer, Austen seems to present a position close to Hume's empiricist views about probable reasonings and "fiction." When she depicts the surmises and inferences of Catherine, she consistently relates Catherine's reasoning with a direct impression, or an indirect one, such as a memory. She also links Catherine's progressive conviction of General Tilney's evil character to her growing feeling of its wickedness. As explained above, Catherine has formed an opinion of General Tilney's character based on repeated evidence of his authoritative and tyrannical behaviors. This evidence is comprised of direct impressions of his attitude towards his children, his peculiar way of pacing the room, his frowning, his wrestling his hands, and the way in which his presence chills and freezes everybody around him. All his efforts of amiability and politeness—which are represented as being rather excessive—towards Catherine, have the effect of making her rather ashamed of not liking him more than she does. The impossibility of liking him informs Catherine of the probability of his unamiability. She cannot but feel antipathy towards him, despite all his efforts to please her. She seems therefore to give to these strong feelings an important weight in her judgment of his character. According to Hume's criteria of probable reasonings, the opinion that Catherine has of General Tilney seems quite acceptable. As we have seen, all of Catherine's reasonings about him are grounded in vivid and lively impressions and bring with them a strong *belief* in their veracity. When Catherine hears of his late wife's favorite walk and of his disdain to follow it, what she infers from this second-hand information is nonetheless very probable. She joins the direct perception of General Tilney's indifference to his late wife's favorite walk to the idea, based on repeated impressions, that humans tend to cherish everything that relates to their departed beloved ones. She therefore concludes, quite reasonably, that if he would have

loved his wife dearly and warmly, he would have rejoiced in this walk, knowing it to be her favorite. This inference leads her toward another: reflecting on the fact that the late Mrs. Tilney used to follow that path, which is dark, gloomy, and sad, alone or with her daughter, Catherine concludes that she was not very happy in her marriage. This reasoning seems also very sound. Founded on the principle of causality, it links the impression of the sad and melancholy walk and Eleanor's memories of her late mother's habits, as an *effect*, with the idea of human's usual behavior when they are unhappy, as its *cause*. The reasoning is probable because it is grounded on real impressions, joined to an appropriate idea, perceived as their cause. Moreover, Catherine's feelings about Mrs. Tilney's unhappiness are lively and vivid and produce in her a strong belief in the rightness of her inference. The rest of the novel confirms rather than dismisses Catherine's suppositions. Gentle hints by Eleanor and Henry indicate that the late Mrs. Tilney might not have had an ideal husband.

As we can observe, Austen attributes to Catherine a series of probable reasonings concerning General Tilney. However, when Catherine becomes bolder in her suppositions about General Tilney, which are based on insufficient evidence, and which she calls "proof," Austen suggests that her heroine has let her imagination run wild in associating ideas and facts that are, in fact, unconnected. The fact that the General does not seem to desire her to visit the bedroom of his departed wife, joined with the fact that her death was sudden, and that Eleanor was not even there when her mother died, cannot constitute in themselves proofs of his having murdered and concealed her body in the house. Sudden illness happens and some husbands regret and mourn more than others their departed wives. From that, one cannot induce the belief and even the probability that they have killed

these wives. This only tends to confirm that General Tilney does not possess a very warm heart and that his love for his wife may have been quite temperate. Consequently, Henry is right when he points out to Catherine that under English law and following cultural rituals, it was highly improbable for a gentleman to murder his wife and not incite suspicion or further enquiry, which may have prevented many husbands to even contemplate the possibility. To lose one's wife suddenly, to relegate her portrait to a place where it could not be seen instead of displaying it as a symbol of veneration and recollection in the drawing room, cannot be taken as facts which prove, without a doubt, that the person who did those things and whose wife died abruptly has necessarily killed her. This part of Catherine's reasoning belongs certainly to what Hume would have called "fiction." Therefore, Austen seems to follow Hume's criteria regarding the acceptability of human reasoning. She demonstrates clearly how Catherine departs from general good sense and an ability for probable reasonings when she depicts her committing the fault of finding in some impressions that she really has, a proof of their being the necessary effect of a very remote and improbable cause. There is no repeated connection observable and somehow registered in human memory between murder and the sudden illness of a person or between assassination and the neglect and indifference toward a departed spouse. Catherine even makes the error of projecting onto this improbable relation of cause and effect her own subjective feeling of its necessity, as it happens sometimes, for Hume, in the case of liars. We must conclude that Austen imputes to Catherine a propensity, in certain circumstances, to succumb to fiction. However, this propensity is for Hume so very common among humans that it cannot be vindicated as a proof of Catherine's being particularly foolish or deluded.

Therefore, it would not be fair to consider Austen's intention in *Northanger Abbey* to mock her heroine and to denounce, through her, the erratic movements of a mind unregulated by reason and overly governed by its fancies. While seeming to concur with Hume's views about the standards of good reasoning and sharing his belief in the human tendency to indulge in fictional fantasies from time to time, Austen nonetheless indicates that in her heroine's case, the reason for departing from sound reasoning and resorting to fictional conjecture may have something to do with the influence of a particular type of fiction, which Hume does not consider seriously in this part of his *Treatise*, that is, the fiction created by the artistic or creative imagination.³⁰⁹ This sort of fiction is presented by the narrator, rightly or wrongly, as having influenced Catherine, leading her to believe in characters and behaviors that are unlikely to exist due to the strictures of English law, that conflict with the soberer reality of humankind, and that ultimately corrupt her judgment. Fiction, in this context, is not merely a false belief, based on an absence of real evidence; it designates, rather, an entire domain of people and actions which may resemble the real, empirical one, but which remains nevertheless different, because constructed, fictitious, and unreal. However, such a fiction may be confounded with the real world and therefore generate "fiction," in the previous sense of false reasonings. By reflecting on literary

³⁰⁹ One can find some reflections on poetry and rhetoric in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. They are envisaged as ways in which the imagination can be overstimulated and thus depart from empirical evidence, by means of the rhetorical powers of language. Literary images and figures of speech can create in the mind strong feelings and beliefs about the veracity of some reasonings, which have no connections to any real sensible impression. However, Hume remains quite sure that the mind is entirely capable of distinguishing between the degree of vivacity which accompanies poetical or rhetorical images and the one which is attached to real sensible impressions. The emotions begotten by poetry remain for him "mere phantoms of belief or persuasion" (73). He does not suspect poetry to be a dangerous source of improbable reasonings; what interests him in literary creations is not its fictive component, but its rhetorical power. This is not, however, the problem that Austen addresses in *Northanger Abbey*. Austen does not suspect literary style to win our agreement by generating false feelings of probability, but she questions the ontological status of fiction, which being only imaginary, seems to be hardly connected to any real sensible impression.

fictions, Austen is considering the possibility, not really envisaged by Hume, that fiction can beget “fiction.” If we consider, however, that everything that we conceive clearly is at least probable, as Hume suggests, and that Catherine’s surmises about General Tilney’s cruelty proved eventually to be true on the basis of his ill-treatment of her—even if he was not his wife’s murderer and probably could not be, his sort of crimes being of a more petty and common sort—we must now consider if the gothic fictions on which Catherine has partly grounded her speculations about General Tilney’s character are without any cognitive interest and remain only a source of potential corruption of human judgment. To explore this question, it is necessary to consider, first, Kant’s position about the imagination and its role in art.

Since he was more preoccupied by the question of taste, and whether it was strictly individual and relative or if it supposed a common standard, however empirical,³¹⁰ Hume did not investigate the relationship between art and reality, but his German contemporary, Kant, gave this topic some thought. Awakened from his dogmatic slumber, as he said himself,³¹¹ by Hume’s doubts and sharp skepticism, his aim was always to resolve these

³¹⁰ In *Of the Standard of Taste*, Hume’s more important aesthetic work, he considers the problem posed by the extreme variety of aesthetic appreciations concerning beauty. Noting that there are “a great variety of tastes, as well as opinions” (1), he also argues that it is “natural for us to seek a Standard of Taste; a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled” (6). He suggests that aesthetic judgment can be compared to sense perceptions in the sense of their being dependent, as to their accuracy, on the fitness, development, and ability of the organs on which they rely. For him, some qualities in the object are the source of our sense perceptions and of our sentiment of approbation regarding their beauty. There are universal canons of beauty, like the work of Homer, which pleases through times and cultures, but only some humans have a taste for beauty sufficiently trained and refined to perceive correctly which work of art deserves to be considered beautiful and therefore to be deemed canonical. The problems that Hume faces here concern the possibility of an agreement between judgments of taste. Kant is also committed to that problem in *The Critique of Judgment*, but he also considers the relation between knowledge and aesthetic judgments, as well as the question of the relationship between nature and art.

³¹¹ In *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, published in 1783, Kant presents Hume as the philosopher who really incites him with the determination to inquire further into the problems of Metaphysics. As he announces in his preface, “I freely admit that the remembrance of David Hume was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my research in the field of speculative philosophy” (9) (Ak V, 260).

doubts and to elevate human aptitude to produce a knowledge of the world that is both universal and necessary.³¹² In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, more precisely in the Transcendental Deduction of the Concepts of the Understanding, Kant intended to prove how the *a priori* concepts of the understanding can determine an objective knowledge of the world.³¹³ Indebted to the rationalist position, as well as to the empiricist one, Kant faced a problem that could not have existed for Hume: the synthesis between pure rational concepts—which for Hume simply do not exist—and sensible intuitions. How can the two relate and, together, produce an objective knowledge of phenomena? For Kant, without the faculty of the imagination, sensible data could not be organized and unified into objective knowledge. The A version of the deduction, which pertains to the first edition of

³¹² In his two prefaces to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant is preoccupied by the scandalous fate of Metaphysics, which has not succeeded in achieving anything resembling scientific status, being deprived of the unity of method and general agreement over results which can be found in mathematics and physics. Compared to them, Metaphysics remains a useless “battlefield” (99) (Ak IV, 7) of conflicted opinions. For Kant, all sciences must contain *a priori* principles, because without them, there could not be any necessity nor universality in their statements, qualities that are indissociable with science. However, empirical, or a priori intuitions are also required for these a priori principles to determine authentic knowledge. The problem regarding Metaphysics is that contrary to Mathematics and Physics, it is formed entirely of *a priori* principles and cannot grasp its object under sensible intuitions. However, the *fact* that Mathematics and Physics are sciences and contain *a priori* principles does not imply that they deserve that status. Kant must therefore ask and resolve these two questions: “How is pure mathematics possible? “How is pure natural science possible?” (147) (Ak III,40). These questions related to the central question of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is: “how are synthetic a priori judgments possible?” (147) (Ak. III, 40).

³¹³ The problem is, in fact, more complex and technical than what I have summarized. It relates to the conditions under which pure a priori concepts of the Understanding can acquire an “objective” value and be applied to the phenomena of sensible experience. Since they are *a priori* concepts and do not have their source in intuition, pure or empirical, one might wonder how these concepts (for instance, the concept of causality) can have any relevance to our knowledge of the empirical world. Therefore, the problem envisaged here demands “how subjective conditions of thinking should have objective validity, i.e., yield conditions of the possibility of all cognition of objects; for appearances can certainly be given in intuition without functions of the understanding” (222) (Ak III, 102). However, one can suppose that the *a priori* concepts of the understanding contain the necessary conditions under which any objects of experience can be thought and known, making them “conditions of experience.” As Kant writes, “Now, however, all experience contains in addition to the intuition of the senses, through which something is given, a concept of an object that is given in intuition, or appears; hence concepts of objects in general lie at the ground of all experiential cognition as a priori conditions; consequently the objective validity of the categories, as a priori concepts, rests on the fact that through them alone is experience possible (as far as the form of thinking is concerned). For they are related necessarily and a priori to objects of experience, since only by means of them can any object of experience be thought at all” (224) (Ak III, 104-105). The problem will remain, however, to understand *how* something that is entirely a priori, general, and abstract can determine something that is particular and sensible, that is, an intuition.

the *Critique of Pure Reason*, attributes an important role to the faculty of the imagination in the deduction of the objective character of the categories of the understanding. For Kant, the imagination accomplishes three syntheses through which our sensible intuitions are transformed into coherent and unified knowledge. My intention is not here to explain Kant's philosophy in detail, but rather to highlight the fact that for Kant, whether for the apprehension of consecutive sensible data —both their reproduction and retention after being perceived, and their unification under a general rule provided by the categories of the understanding —the imagination is *absolutely* required.³¹⁴ The understanding alone is a mere form without content; the intuitions alone are unintelligible, so to bridge the gap between them, the imagination must play an active part, being an intermediate faculty between sensibility and the understanding. In this role, the imagination is conceived by Kant as being *reproductive* but not *productive*: it reproduces intuition and relates it to intellectual categories. However, in the B edition of the transcendental deduction, if Kant greatly diminishes the role previously attributed to the imagination in the constitution of objective knowledge, putting more emphasis on transcendental apperception,³¹⁵ he still confers to the imagination a productive fundamental role, that is, to produce *schemas*. Between the pure concepts of the understanding and the particularity of intuitions there must be, for Kant, “a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other and makes possible the application of the

³¹⁴ For a full explanation of the triple synthesis of the imagination, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 228-234. (Ak IV,77-83).

³¹⁵ The shift of emphasis is striking, since the Deduction begins with a paragraph entitled “On The Original Synthetic Unity of Apperception” (246) (Ak III, 111). The transcendental apperception is given tremendous importance, because only “this thoroughgoing identity of the apperception of a manifold given in intuition contains a synthesis of the representations” (247) (Ak III, 112). On the contrary “the empirical consciousness that accompanies different representations is by itself dispersed and without relation to the identity of the subject” (247) (Ak III, 113). Therefore, no synthesis of the manifold of intuitions can ever be achieved without the transcendental apperception, the “I” to which all the intuitions are reported or related.

former to the latter” (272). This third element “is the transcendental schema” (Kant 272). To be applied to sensible intuitions, abstract rules must be schematized by the imagination, using one of the *a priori* forms of pure intuition, which is also the form of our inner sense: time.³¹⁶ The schema is therefore a kind of representation that is both intellectual and sensible, and which is, for this reason, homogenous both to the category of the understanding and of sensible intuitions. The difference between the schema and, say, an image, is that the image remains a concrete singular representation of an object of intuition, while the schema is a universal figure produced by the imagination to give to a category of the understanding a way to apply its rule to singular sensible intuitions. For Kant, the schema must be “distinguished from an image” (273), because it does not aim to produce an “individual intuition” but “only the unity in the determination of sensibility” (273). For instance, the image of a triangle is always singular, but the rules by which one might construct a triangle in his imagination is a schema of the pure abstract concept of the triangle. My claim here is that figures of speech such as metaphors, metonymies, and analogies function similarly as schemas. For various reasons, they are similar but not identical. First, they do not have the universality of schemas and are more particular. Second, they are not directly related, as rules of determination, to the categories of the understanding. However, as “aesthetical Ideas” (Kant *Critique of Judgment* 118), they enlarge “aesthetically the concept itself in an unbounded fashion” (118) and produce a movement toward “more thought that can be grasped in the representation or made clear” (118). Aesthetical ideas, for Kant, are similar to schemas because the images they provide help the understanding to go beyond the conventionality and limited scale of general words

³¹⁶ See Kant 272 (Ak III, 136).

or concepts to grasp a larger and more varied field of connected significations, which enlarge the mind and deepen our comprehension of things.³¹⁷ In a sense, as much as the abstract idea of a triangle cannot be traced and applied to any given manifold of empirical intuitions without its corresponding schema or figurative synthesis, the conceptions embedded in ordinary language remain limited and empty without the recourse of imaginative literary figures by which suddenly they “enliven the mind by opening out to it the prospect of illimitable fields of kindred representations” (Kant 119).

The notion of an aesthetical Idea is closely related for Kant to the concept of Genius. In the *Critique of Judgment*, he distinguishes beautiful art from mere mechanical art by the fact that only the former is “a product of Genius” (113). Genius is, for him, “the talent (or natural gift) which gives the rule to Art” (112). Since this talent, as a personal disposition, is natural, we can specify the definition of genius by saying that it is “a mental disposition (*ingenium*) through which Nature gives the rule to Art” (Kant 112). Only a genius can create aesthetical ideas and, thus, beautiful art, because a genius does not imitate previous models. He does not follow simply technical rules of artistic production. The freedom of the genius’ creative imagination enables him to invent his own rules, which are particular to him, and at the same time, so unconsciously applied, that he would be unable to explain them to another or to teach anyone about them. Contrary to great scientists such as Newton, the artistic genius “cannot show how his Ideas, so rich in fancy and yet so full of thought, come together in his head, simply because he does not know and therefore cannot teach others” (Kant 113). The rules created by geniuses are the work of *Nature* within them. It follows that what geniuses create can be regarded as a *second Nature*, or as part of a realm

³¹⁷ See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 119 (Ak V, 315).

determined by laws of freedom. In the hand of geniuses, the productive imagination becomes for Kant a powerful agent for “creating, another nature, as it were, out of the material supplied to it by actual nature” (118). Artistic genius, creating a second nature out of the first, produces what we have called earlier “a world of illusion” by reorganizing and remodeling what is already given in nature or “the real world.” Geniuses create aesthetic Ideas, which surpass nature as such, while being at the same time made of its material. As such, these artistic creations cannot produce a knowledge of nature, as physics can do; rather, they subjectively “quicken our cognitive powers” (Kant 120). Based on Kant’s conception of Genius and of aesthetical Ideas, I defend here the claim that literary fiction, by reorganizing in original and unsuspected ways the material elements of the world into new forms, enhances the power of our cognitive faculties and enlarges our understanding of the world. I shall demonstrate this claim by drawing on some passages from *Northanger Abbey* in which Austen, far from opposing the real world and the world of fiction, and devaluating Gothic novels due to their lack of realism, affirms the important role of fiction for a thorough understanding of the world.

First, one must consider that Catherine Morland’s reading of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* provides her with figures or images with which she is able to grasp General Tilney’s real personality— applying to him, for instance the schema of a “*Montoni*”— even if he remains an eighteenth-century English version of a Montoni and is not likely to be a murderer. Even if simple, matter-of-fact Catherine seems always bewildered and confused when someone, notably Henry, talks to her in an ironic register, or when she is faced with boasting or contradictory assertions like those uttered by John Thorpe and his sister Isabella, it does not necessarily mean, as Margaret Doody has argued, that she is

wholly uneducated in the subtleties of language and that she lacks insight into figurative modes of expression. Doody argues that Catherine's problems in *Northanger Abbey* arise mostly from her inability to understand figurative modes of language. While the novel suggests that Catherine has had her mind corrupted by fiction and overindulges in fancies of the imagination, she affirms to the contrary that it is precisely her lack of imagination and "ignorance of figures of speech" (168), which occasion all her troubles. She goes on to affirm that: "Catherine's lack of analytic capacity is of a piece with her ignorance of the figurative" (118). This severe portrait of Catherine's capacities, which even attributes her true judgment of General Tilney's character to her feelings instead of her understanding, seems exaggerated and partially wrong. If it is true that Catherine has problems understanding irony, double meanings, strange comparisons, and metaphors as they surface in everyday language, she accepts them in works of fiction and uses literary images to extend her knowledge of people and of the world. Catherine is a genuine truth-seeker and the use she makes of fiction and literary images is always directed to serious thought instead of playful irony.³¹⁸ Her frequent wanderings back and forth from the images and types found in novels and the empirical realities she perceives are not only a testimony to her ability to use the figurative and the poetic to decipher the complexities of real life, but also an indication of the formative role that the author attributes to these novels in Catherine's learning process.

From the start, we should admit that Catherine is presented as an exceptionally naïve young girl, whose parents are simple, matter of fact people. Moreover, her mother's lack of imagination and "useful plain sense" (37) is clearly not morally ideal when it comes

³¹⁸ See Margaret Ann Doody, "Turns of Speech and Figures of Mind," 165-184.

to the education of her daughters. She often seems incapable of envisaging possible evils or difficulties or understanding passions and sentiments more intense than her own. Being busy “lying in and teaching the little ones” (39), she cannot really take good care of the education of her older daughters, including Catherine. When Catherine finally quits this quiet and uneventful environment, her mother is not even able to warn her about the possible dangers or trials she might encounter on her journey in a bigger city. Her only laconic counsel is: “I beg, Catherine, you always wrap yourself up very warm about the throat, when you come from the rooms at night: and wish you would try to keep some account of the money you spend” (42). Her advice concerns physical and material matters only. She has no wisdom to share regarding other human beings and the complex and sometimes intricate rules of propriety and decorum, and no warnings concerning the “general mischievousness” of “lords and baronets” (42). If the purpose of Austen in comparing this plain speech with that generally found in sentimental or Gothic novels is to denounce the latter’s theatricality and dramatic exaggeration, it also serves to show how such a mother, however kind, is totally unable to prepare her daughter to face the dangers and difficulties of a journey in a city such as Bath.³¹⁹ It is, in fact, through the reading of

³¹⁹ Much has been said about Austen’s depiction of mothers in her novels. It has been remarked that these mothers are either absent or inadequate. Some even suggest that her picture of neglectful mothers is based on the disappointment she experienced in her relationship with her own mother. It is hard to deny that most of the mothers in her novels are unfit to the role, being either too busy or too lazy, invariably selfish and often foolish. However, compared to Mrs. Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* or Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, Mrs. Morland is certainly less incompetent. Nonetheless, despite her good intentions, she seems too busy to undertake seriously the education of her daughters. Many critics have suggested that Austen was not so much criticizing these inadequate mothers as pointing to the unrealistic expectations that were raised about them. Eighteenth-century culture has put much emphasis on the central educational role of mothers. Consequently, women felt an intense social pressure to meet standards that were not always realistic. Regarding Austen and mothers, see Mary Margaret Benson, “Mothers, Substitute Mothers, and Daughters in the Novels of Jane Austen”; Jean Johnson Grandesbery, “Versions of the Mother in Novels of Jane Austen and George Eliot”; Aisha Al-Habi, “Dysfunctional Motherhood in Jane Austen’s Novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*”; Elvira Caral, “Motherhood and Reality in *Northanger Abbey*”; Geoffrey Gorer, “Poor Honey: Some Notes on Jane Austen and her Mother.”

Gothic novels that Catherine educates herself and becomes able to translate what she perceives in her environment into the images, metaphors, and types of the “novel world.”

³²⁰ Gothic novels provide her with what she has never imagined or encountered: passionate and greedy villains, treacherous and adulterous women, haughty and cruel mothers or aunts, and unapologetic murderers. Her exposure to such figures suggests to her that beneath the surface, colored by good manners, dignity, and graciousness, may lay the sordid knot of ambition, anger, treachery, envy, rage, and jealousy. She learns to see through the false amiable, courteous, and generous appearance of General Tilney, who invites her into his Abbey because he believes her to be rich, but who then instantly and without any tact or decency, throws her out of his house when he learns reports to the contrary. How could good Mrs. Morland have ever imagined anybody behaving that way? As to Catherine’s first friend in Bath, Isabella Thorpe, she turns out to be the contrary of what she professes to be: a negligent friend, a coquette, a scheming ambitious woman interested in little more than money, and an unfaithful fiancée. All her effusions and declarations of disinterestedness, her so-called disdain of men, and the high value she bestows on friendship prove to me mere lies, a sort of screen designed to hide her real personality. Catherine slowly begins to suspect her of being insincere and the more the story unfolds, the more certain her belief in her selfishness and heartlessness grows. The inadequacies between her sayings and her actions are registered by Catherine and analyzed by referencing novelistic types. Stimulated by her readings, she becomes attentive to the language used by her beloved friend. She slowly notices Isabella’s recurrent usage of superlatives and exaggerated expressions, which are never to be found in the mouth of

gothic or sentimental novel's heroines, who speak a soberer language. On the contrary, inflated expressions invade the discourse of this shallow and superficial heroine. Her exaggerated and somewhat phony discourse bears testimony to the influence of Burney work on Austen's. One is reminded of Miss Larolles,³²¹ when Isabella, meeting Catherine on the morrow of their last encounter, exclaims: "I have been waiting for you at least this age!" (60). She continues to assume the same tone when she pretends that she has "a hundred things to say" (60) to her. On other occasion, after having assured her friend that she "would not stand up without her for all the world" (74), she rapidly leaves her for the whole evening in order to dance with her brother. Catherine gradually understands that, contrary to Eleanor Tilney, Isabella merely professes to be a heroine. Her manners are bold and indelicate, and she has nothing of the modesty, elegance, and real sympathy that are found in the female protagonists of Gothic and sentimental novels. The ironic distance between her speeches and her actions cannot go unnoticed and her affectation of friendship cannot deceive a sober mind like Catherine's for very long. Catherine, in short, sees progressively that she is a fraud, and that Eleanor Tilney has more sincerity and "real elegance" (77). To realize who Isabella really is, Catherine needs to experience real facts and collect diverse impressions, but her judgment on these impressions is guided by the literary type of a virtuous and noble heroine, like Emily de Saint-Aubert in *Udolpho*, and by its antitype, the selfish, greedy, and wordly Madame Chéron, or the ambitious and passionate Laurentina.³²² Moreover, Catherine uses Gothic novels to disclose to her naïve

³²¹ Miss Larolles is a funny but selfish and shallow character in Frances Burney's *Cecilia*. Although she is not deliberately malignant, she is careless and unscrupulous. Her language is punctuated by inflated expressions and dramatic exclamations. That is why she is categorized by Mr. Gosport as part of the social category of the "Volubiles." See Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*, 40.

³²² In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily, the perfect heroine, is confronted to anti-heroines such as her aunt, Mme Chéron, who becomes Mme Montoni after her marriage with the novel's villain. Mme Chéron is

mind the possibility of evil and wickedness; experience alone would not have been sufficient to achieve her learning on Isabella's and Eleanor's true characters. To form her judgment about others and the world, Catherine uses logic, probable reasoning, and the help of the literary imagination. For her, the real world and the world of fiction are not completely separated; she can live in one, while also living in the other. Contrary to Isabella, who seems more interested by young men and the possibility of attracting their notice, Catherine prefers to talk about fiction, exclaiming candidly of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* that she would readily spend her "whole life in reading it" (61).

The proximity of the world of fiction and the empirical world of facts and the possibility that these two different worlds might overlap and illuminate each other at times are not ideas that would be approved of by the ironical and condescending Henry Tilney. On the contrary, he mocks the confusion which occurs between Catherine and his sister about "something very shocking, indeed" (126) that "will soon come out in London" (126). While Catherine is referring to the publication of a new Gothic novel, the other thinks that it is about riots and violence in the streets of London. If Henry patronizes the young women and teases them about their tendency to confuse real events and literature, the novel shows that his irony and condescension are not founded and that his opinion of the superiority of men's over women's minds should be revised.³²³ The famous Gordon Riots of 1780 and

presented as a vain coquette. She is also an admirer of wealth and rank. Her love of wealth and her selfishness make her greedy and unable to feel sympathy toward others. Like Emily, she does not like solitude, or tranquil activities such as reading or playing musical instruments. She is, on the contrary, a fan of company and of feasts and parties. Laurentina, on the other hand, is presented more as a passionate and unregulated person, who would always follow her desires, even if to fulfil them, she must kill an innocent. See Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

³²³ While being more feminine and subtle than the brutal John Thorpe, Henry Tilney is nonetheless condescending in his attitudes about women's minds and cognitive capacities. Even if his ironic tone prevents any direct or literal interpretation of his words, he nevertheless makes some observations about women, which suggest that men are somehow superior to them. Commenting on the misunderstanding between his

the periods of civil unrest during the 1790s suggest that terrible things do occur in Britain and not only in Gothic novels or distant ‘barbaric’ Italy. Moreover, one should recognize that the coming out of a novel is a real historical event awaited by real persons in the empirical world and that such an event can have a concrete influence on people, whether one approves of it or not. Even if Henry Tilney appears as Austen’s substitute in the novel as he adopts the author’s distant posture towards the other characters and the narrative, when one reflects on the entire work, one cannot but concede that Austen proves him wrong and intends to laugh at all his supposed superior knowledge and condescension toward women.³²⁴ If the novel, as it undeniably does, contains some elements of parody through which certain conventions of Gothic novels are gently mocked, it incorporates nevertheless a strong defense of novels, Gothic or not, which, joined with an obvious admiration for novelists such as Radcliffe and Burney, precludes any reading which would assert that the work depreciates fiction in favor of “reality.” In the end, the reader cannot but agree that Catherine was right about the real personality of Henry’s father, much as she has been right about the dubious and immoral intentions of his brother, Frederick. Her judgment has not been corrupted by novels but rather enriched by the character types, images, and possibilities they contain, which work for her as tools to interpret real life.

sister and Catherine, he declares, “I will be noble. I will prove myself a man, no less by the generosity of my soul than the clearness of my head” (*Northanger Abbey* 126). As to the cognitive abilities of women, he admits that they might not be “either sound nor acute—neither vigorous nor keen. Perhaps they may want observation, discernment, judgment, fire, genius, and wit” (126). Of course, in this passage, he is teasing Catherine, as he often does, but there is usually some truth underneath such gentle mockery. It is therefore probable that he believes women to be more credulous and less rational than men.

³²⁴ Marvin Mudrick presents Henry Tilney as the author’s surrogate in *Northanger Abbey*. See Mudrick 60. For her part, Caroline L. Johnson disagrees with this position and refuses to see Henry Tilney as the representation of Austen’s own perspective on other characters and general topics in the novel. See Johnson 34.

5.4 From an Ironic Stance to a Moral Belief in the World

As Gilbert Ryle rightly remarks, Jane Austen's characters are not Manichean. They are neither totally good nor totally bad.³²⁵ For him, this is due to Austen's Aristotelian understanding of humans and morals, a philosophical tendency which was opposed, in the eighteenth century, to a Calvinist interpretation of humans, according to which "Man's life here is either a life of Sin or else it is a life of self-extrication from Sin" (Ryle 294). Some critics have claimed that Austen's characters possess more complexity than the usual characters one might find in eighteenth-century novels of sensibility, or in gothic novels.³²⁶ In Richardsonian novels, for instance, one knows practically from the start which characters are good and bad, and these characters usually remain static from the beginning to the end of the novel. In Austen's novels, however, the most important characters undergo processes of change and evolution. They are usually transformed by their relationships and discussions with others, and by the reflections occasioned by the overturning of their perspectives. Accordingly, following a character's transformation, the reader gains access to multiple interpretations of the world and enlarges his/her own limited conception of human life. Austen, however, also portrays characters who cannot and will not change. Such characters remain stuck in the subjective particularity of their own perspective about

³²⁵ See Gilbert Ryle, "Jane Austen and the Moralists," 294.

³²⁶ Ryle mocks the pure wickedness of the seducer in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*. See Ryle 294. Kenneth L. Mohler argues, for his part, that if Austen borrows types from sentimental novels, it is only to deconstruct them, tone them down, or produce anti-types, infusing more complexity into her characters. For instance, he presents Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice*, as an anti-Evelina—the heroine of Frances Burney's first novel—and Darcy, Elizabeth's admirer, as a far less perfect character than Evelina's suitor, Lord Orville. According to him, Lord Orville is too perfect and Evelina too readily admiring of his grandeur to represent a credible human character. See Kenneth L. Moler, "*Pride and Prejudice*: Jane Austen's Patrician Hero," 497-505.

things and are unable to open their minds to the perspectives of others. These characters are incapable of evolution or growth.³²⁷

Moral growth and personal evolution imply self-awareness and the capacity to feel sympathy toward others. Following Christel Fricke, I see Austen's account of moral development in her novels as largely inspired by the eighteenth-century philosophical conception of "sympathy."³²⁸ For philosophers such as David Hume and Adam Smith, morality is based on a moral sentiment called sympathy. As discussed in chapter two, Hume and Smith are part of a philosophical tradition inaugurated by Shaftesbury which rejected the contemporaneous rationalist and utilitarian version of morality.³²⁹ This moral movement had the effect of reviving the Aristotelian conception of personal virtue. Adopting the doctrine of sympathy, Austen appears therefore in her novels as a true defender of virtue ethics. For Alasdair McIntyre, she should herself be considered as an independent and original moral virtue theorist.³³⁰ Far from contesting this view, I want to

³²⁷As Marvin Mudrick says, these characters remain in a state of immaturity and cannot really become moral agents. See Mudrick 106.

³²⁸ Christel Fricke keenly notes the influence of the concept of "sympathetic process", borrowed from the philosopher Adam Smith on Austen's moral thought. See Fricke, "The Challenges of *Pride and Prejudice*: Adam Smith and Jane Austen on Moral Education," 2.

³²⁹ See chapter two, 34-35.

³³⁰ For a majority of late twentieth- to twenty-first-century philosophers, Jane Austen appears not only as a gifted writer of entertaining novels, but also as a moralist who not only displays or exemplifies moral theories and moral dilemmas in a concrete and complex way, but also produces a moral system of her own. Alasdair McIntyre, in *After Virtue*, published in 1983, ranges Austen among the most prominent Western Modern virtue ethicists and insists on her capacity to make a synthesis between Homeric, Aristotelian, and New Testament virtues. As he remarks, "her views combine elements from Homer as well, since she is concerned with social roles in a way that neither the New Testament nor Aristotle are. She is therefore important for the way in which she finds it possible to combine what are at first sight disparate theoretical accounts of the virtues" (185). However, other philosophers have also considered Austen as a moralist belonging both to the Aristotelian tradition and the eighteenth-century moral philosophical current of moral sentiment. On that subject, see: Ryle, "Jane Austen and the Moralists, 286-301"; D. D. Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education*, 68-75; E.M. Dadlez, *Mirrors to One Another: Emotion and Value in Jane Austen and David Hume*; Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*. The affinity between Jane Austen's novels and Aristotelian ethics has also received close attention from literary scholars such as Sarah Emsley, Amanda Marie Kubic, and Robert Hopkins. See Sarah Emsley, *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues*; Amanda Marie Kubic, "Aristotelian Ethical Ideas in the Novels of Jane Austen"; Robert Hopkins, "Moral Luck and Judgment in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*."

argue that Jane Austen's personal interest in morals and the cultivation of virtues explains the realistic turn by which she refuses to paint the world and others as sources of alienation and horror, as was the case in sentimental and Gothic novels written by her British women novelist predecessors.³³¹ The modern separation of the self from the world is never experienced in her novels as a tragedy. The other humans, and the world at large, are never presented in Austen's novels as a terrifying alterity. Moreover, the female self does not appear in her novels as especially surrounded by dangers and threats of all sorts.³³² If she relativizes these problems through ironic play and through a recognition of the important role devoted to the imagination in the constitution of the world, she is also deeply committed to the reality of human life and situations as the space of moral action. For her, the necessity to act in the world, to make good or bad choices that will affect our lives and those of others, appears as the fundamental reason to believe in this world and in the reality of others. The world in which we act is not merely a subjective representation of something outward that may not exist or even resemble reality, but the domain of practical action, where we develop personal excellences and virtues, and in which we try to act according to what is best and appropriate, conforming to virtue and contrary to vice. It is, in short, the only world that matters, and one in which we must necessarily believe. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, even if Austen was likely unaware of the contemporary

³³¹ She also differs from her Romantic and Victorian successors, Mary Shelley and the Brontës, who seem to belong much more to the tradition of Frances Burney and Ann Radcliffe.

³³² If we compare the attitude and fate of Lydia, Elizabeth's foolish sister in *Pride and Prejudice*, with Clarissa's tragic death in Richardson's *Clarissa* or Emily de Saint-Aubert's anxious fear of being raped or abducted by count Murano, in the middle of the night, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, we cannot but admit that there is a significant difference between her and these characters. Lydia experiences no fear, sadness, or misery, even though she elopes with a man who does not intend to marry her. She amuses herself without any consciousness of her degradation and, after a little inquietude on her family's side, she is rescued from a disgrace she has never seriously contemplated, by her sister's suitor, Mr. Darcy. Everything ends well, nobody dies, and the little family crisis is overcome gracefully.

debate started by Jacobi in Germany about the Spinozism of Lessing, and the subsequent problems discussed in his *Open Letter* to Fichte, she nevertheless adopts a position about modern subjectivism and its skeptical tendencies that recalls both Jacobi and Fichte. While she remains aware of the constructed aspect of human representations of the world, notably through the powers of the imagination, as explored in the above discussion of *Northanger Abbey*, and of its resemblance with fiction, she nevertheless separates this question, which is epistemic and relates to *knowledge*, from a *moral* question, which demands that we act in the world and believe in its reality. It is in a real world and toward real people that Elizabeth Bennet and Anne Elliot must act and acquire knowledge through reflection, sympathy, and constant efforts towards moral excellency. If a strong belief in the world is demanded of a moral temperament, this belief receives additional support from the spontaneity of feelings, such as sympathy. Through an analysis of some passages in *Persuasion*, I will go on to argue that sympathy for Austen connects humans to others and makes them responsive to alterity.³³³ As I will demonstrate, in her account of sympathy, she follows in large part Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. However, she distances herself from Smith through her objective understanding of the virtues. Finally, my claim will be that she elaborates an original type of virtue ethic, which is inseparable from the novelistic form, and that she reclaims the world for the modern subject through moral action and sympathy.

³³³ Even if John Gibson and Stanley Cavell do not refer explicitly to sympathy when they discuss the receptivity of the reader or spectator to the emotions felt by characters in novels or plays, as a source of learning and knowledge, and as a way to recognize other people's feelings as real and therefore to respond to them appropriately, they assert that alterity cannot be considered as real without being acknowledged and responded to. According to Cavell, it is "through our successes and failures of acknowledgment" that "we announce our participation in (or our estrangement from) a shared form of life" (*Must We Mean* 233). See Chapter two, 25.

As some critics have remarked, most of Jane Austen's novels are constructed around one major virtue or vice, such as pride, prejudice, sensibility, sense, or persuadability.³³⁴ Her narratives present different variations of these personal moral qualities and provide the reader with examples of what an excess or a defect of these qualities in certain characters may cause to themselves and to others.³³⁵ Her novels also demonstrate how characters may vary, depending on the degree to which they possess these qualities or vices. If the intrigue among Austen's characters about questions of courtship and marriage is important, so is the moral reflection which accompanies it.³³⁶ For instance, in *Persuasion*, Austen tells the story of two ancient lovers who have learned to forget the past and to fall in love again, but she also provides a reflection about the excesses and defects of persuadability. In fact, these two aims are closely connected. The discussion about persuasion cannot be separated, as though it were an independent concept, from the characters and the narrative, because the excess or defect of that quality—in cases where someone is too persuadable, persuadable in certain circumstances or unpersuadable—is at

³³⁴ Gilbert Ryle famously contends that with the exception of *Northanger Abbey*, each of Austen's novels develops a relationship with a major moral theme. This theme is usually announced in the title. For him, "*Sense and Sensibility* really is about the relations between Sense and Sensibility or, as we might put it, between Head and Heart, Thought and Feeling, Judgement and Emotion, or Sensibleness and Sensitiveness. *Pride and Prejudice* really is about pride and about the misjudgments that stem from baseless pride, excessive pride, deficient pride, pride in trivial objects and so on. *Persuasion* really is or rather does set out to be about persuadability, unpersuadability and over-persuadability" (287). On this subject, see also Craig Taylor and Sean Haylock, "Free Indirect Style and Moral Thought in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*"; Richard Gilmore, «The Language Games of Persuasion," 182.

³³⁵ Referring to Noël Carroll, Craig Taylor and Sean Haylock use the concept of a virtue wheel to describe the subtle moral variations in terms of quality, from excess to defect, and also borrow Gilbert Ryle's wine tasting analogy to describe what kind of aptitudes the reading of Austen's novels expect from their readers if they are to enter into the complexity of comparing and discriminating among degrees of moral virtues and their correlated vices. See Craig Taylor and Sean Haylock, "Free Indirect Style and Moral Thought in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*," 3-4

³³⁶ I cannot but agree with Christel Fricke when she contends that "Below the surface of romance and the question 'Who marries whom?' which appears to exclusively determine the plots of [Austen's] novels, the attentive reader discovers a sociologically, psychologically and also philosophically informed sub-text which provides a subtle study of human nature and conduct, of archetypal characters, their follies, weaknesses, but also their moral concerns and virtues" (Fricke 1).

the basis of the separation of the two lovers, Anne Elliot and Frederic Wentworth, and at the source of their reunion. It is also the quality around which revolves the moral differences between all the characters in the novel. The impossibility to distinguish the narrative from the moral reflection provided in this novel demonstrates that for Austen, one can only really learn what persuasion is, and how it can be a virtue or a vice, through a concrete narrative with particular situations and characters. For her, a discussion of moral virtue and vice cannot be realized without being represented and imbricated into the fabric of a narrative involving different characters and different concrete situations. True moral reflection is impossible outside of the space of novels. We may think that we know what persuasion is, but what a novel as precise and meticulous as *Persuasion* makes us see is that this moral quality is rather complex and that it can assume multiple forms. First, as John Gilmore has remarked, Austen distinguishes between two major kinds of persuasion in her novel in a way that recalls the distinctions made by Socrates in the *Gorgias*.³³⁷ The first is based on real knowledge, and it changes the mind of the person in question. The other is based on appearances, convention, and short-lived pleasures, and it does not bring about any change in the person's mind. According to John Gilmore, one can find these two sorts of persuasion in Jane Austen's last novel. The second sort of persuasion, conventional and not founded on knowledge, is demonstrated when Anne is persuaded by Lady Russell to renounce Frederick Wentworth out of prudential considerations and conventionalities, and the second sort when Anne, reflecting for herself, becomes persuaded that she would have been happier married to Frederick Wentworth, although

³³⁷ Richard Gilmore makes an interesting connection between Austen's interpretation of persuasion and the twofold distinction made by Socrates in Plato's *Gorgias*. See Richard Gilmore, "The Languages Games of Persuasion," 182-183.

young and with an uncertain and precarious future, than to have lived all these years alone in her unsympathetic family.³³⁸ But there are other versions of persuasion that can be drawn from this novel. The narrative clearly discriminates between the sort of persuasion that comes from another person, like, for instance, Lady Russell's attempts at persuading Ann of renouncing to marry Frederick Wentworth, and an inward and personal persuasion, which is much like the one Anne forms for herself when she reflects on her past decisions. The novel also uses persuasion as a way to determine the degree of wisdom and good sense shared between characters. Some, like Henrietta Musgrove, are too easily influenced by the attempts at persuasion from others and show no capacity for autonomous reflection; others, like Henrietta's sister Louisa, are too headstrong and refuse to listen to a good advice. Also, what can persuade one person can differ considerably from what is able to persuade another, and it is in this difference that the character's moral value and intelligence lies. For instance, Sir Walter cannot be persuaded to diminish his expenses in order to reimburse his creditors and continue to live in his estate, but he can be persuaded to rent his home and live in the same splendid manner as before in Bath. Honor, dignity, and the good management of his estate are not valued by Sir Walter, who prefers the appearances of wealth and grandeur to everything that might diminish his *éclat*. These values are not sensible ones and mark him as a vain and foolish creature. One can also see that if he cannot be persuaded by the truth, but only by reasonings made based on appearances, he is also unable to change and must remain the same incorrigible fool.

³³⁸ Ann, having been persuaded by someone else to give up her engagement to Captain Wentworth, is, eight years later, personally and intimately persuaded that "under every disadvantage of disapprobation at home, and every anxiety attending his profession, all their probable fears, delays and disappointments, she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, that she has been in the sacrifice of it" (Austen, *Persuasion* 68).

Austen shows that the ability to be persuaded by the truth must be accompanied by the faculty of being able to truly listen and understand another perspective, and by the ability to reflect on this perspective, thus producing internal conviction. That is why a persuasion based on knowledge, which can itself beget personal change, is impossible without sympathy.

5.5 Smith's Conception of Mutual Sympathy and Moral Growth and its Influence on Austen

Christel Fricke makes a convincing case for the influence that Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* might have had on Austen's conception of virtue. She demonstrates how Austen, like Smith, places the concept of sympathy at the basis of moral judgment, how this sentiment enables characters to surmount their limited perspectives, to embrace that of others, and how this process of mutual sympathy brings forth moral development.³³⁹ Austen's conception of virtue is undeniably close to that of Adam Smith's and I do not contest that she might have been acquainted with Smith's work, which may very well have influenced her thought.³⁴⁰ However, I argue that Austen is not simply applying Smith's moral conception of sympathy. She also criticizes some of his assumptions about virtue. While she agrees that sympathy is a *means* through which we can enlarge our own restricted perspective to consider things from another's point of view,

³³⁹ The close relationship between Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the process of mutual sympathy used in Jane Austen to describe the moral development of her main characters in *Pride and Prejudice* is the principal claim of Christel Fricke's article "The Challenges of *Pride and Prejudice*: Adam Smith and Jane Austen on Moral Education," 1. However, she is not the only one who has remarked on the proximity between Austen and Smith as to their conception of the virtues and the development of moral judgment. On this subject, see Michelle Larrow, "Using sympathetic Imagination to live morally. Jane Austen's Expansion of Adam Smith"; Elaine Bander, "Cheerful Beyond Expectation': Mrs. Smith, Adam Smith, and Austen"; Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*"; Kenneth Moler, "The Bennet Girls and Adam Smith on Vanity and Pride."

³⁴⁰ Scholars tend to disagree regarding Austen's actual knowledge of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Some allude to indirect sources as the most probable source of her familiarity with Smith's work, while others claim that she must have had direct access to the book. On this debate, see Christel Fricke, "The Challenges of *Pride and Prejudice*: Adam Smith and Jane Austen on Moral Education," 2, note 4.

she refuses to present sympathy as the sole fundament of virtue and vice. This difference is of importance because it shows a reluctance on her part to subordinate all moral virtues to subjective sympathies.

The concept of sympathy, both for Hume and for Smith, can be defined as the capacity to imagine ourselves in the place of others and to feel their pain or joy in certain situations.³⁴¹ This “fellow-feeling” is at the basis of our moral judgment with regards to the virtues or vices of others.³⁴² It implies that we tend to approve or disapprove of human behaviors proportionately to their ability to cause in us pain or joy. This joy or pain is felt by “bringing home” to us what we imagine the other to feel in a particular given situation.³⁴³ For instance, when the sufferings of someone who has been unjustly treated induces in us a similar feeling of pain, our displeasure is what will determine us to call the one who causes that pain a vicious person. On the contrary, when the pleasure of a man who has been rescued from misery by the generosity of another is communicated to us, we approve of this benevolent action and deem it virtuous. While Hume concedes that all virtues cannot be directly perceived through natural sympathy but rather depend on the mediation of experience and education,³⁴⁴ Smith remains convinced that natural sympathy is at the source of all the virtues.³⁴⁵ However, he concedes that some feelings cannot be

³⁴¹ For two different definitions of sympathy, see David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 294; Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 4-5.

³⁴² Smith uses the expression “fellow feeling” before turning to the term sympathy, but he also affirms that these terms are synonymous. See Smith 5.

³⁴³ Smith uses the expression “bring home” to describe the way in which sympathy requires the subject to imagine another’s feelings or opinions as if they were his/her own. See Smith 14 and 16.

³⁴⁴ Hume explains that the virtue of justice, for instance, is not naturally acquired, but depends on reflection, based on experience, about the utility of this quality for the welfare of the social community. We therefore sympathize with victims of injustice because we have learned and integrated it as a vice injurious to humans in general. See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 254.

³⁴⁵ There is no distinction made between natural and artificial virtues in Smith’s work; he seems to attribute to spontaneous feelings of sympathy the origin of all our moral approvals and disapprovals. See Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, chap.1.

communicated to another without reflecting on their appropriateness and their cause. Sympathy, therefore, is not always immediate, since it is often mediated by reflection.³⁴⁶ An interesting element of Smith's account of sympathy is the necessity to envisage it as a double movement, one coming from the spectator, and the other from the person who feels actual pleasure or pain. The spectator has to imagine what the other person feels in order to partake of his feeling, but the person who actually feels pain or pleasure must imagine what the spectator might feel or think of his situation, being someone who is not personally concerned by it. As Smith explains, nature realizes the harmony or concord of sympathetic feelings by teaching "the spectator to assume the circumstances of the person principally concerned" and by teaching "this last in some measure to assume those of the spectator" (17). This same sort of dualistic sympathy occurs, for Smith, when a person is alone with herself and tries to elucidate the propriety of her feelings in a certain situation. This person must try to place herself in the position of an impartial observer and consider her own subjective point of view from his/her disengaged perspective. The objective is to attain harmony between the two perspectives, which often, but not always, calls forth a toning down of one person's feelings and an attenuation of his/her harsh and violent opinions to a level that another, disengaged person, would find appropriate. According to Smith, "the pitch with which the spectator can go along with, must lie, (...), in a certain mediocrity" (22). By mediocrity, he means that the passion felt by the person concerned will appear for the spectator too high or too low and should be leveled to an acceptable state. Smith admits, moreover, that passions are more often judged too high by spectators than too low. This

³⁴⁶ See Smith 6.

dualistic process of mutual sympathy is for Smith the true source of moral growth and of the achievement of virtue.

Austen's most important characters engage in this sort of reciprocal process of sympathy, and it is only these characters who are capable of moral evolution and, therefore, virtue. For instance, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth and Darcy, the two most important characters in the novel, are also the ones who undergo the most significant change in their opinions and behaviors. Both slowly learn to recognize the other's point of view and feelings and incite reflections on their own feelings and conduct, thus developing self-awareness of their own exaggerated pride or of their own prejudices. Over the course of the narrative, Darcy becomes less proud and authoritative, learning to estimate people on other grounds and for other reasons than their wealth and rank. Likewise, Elizabeth learns to appreciate the true honesty, generosity, and courage of Darcy and to doubt her own overly hasty and unfounded assumptions about him. If these two characters change for the better and improve their personal moral qualities, while lessening their vices, the same cannot be said of Lydia, Wickham, or Mrs. Bennet. These characters remain static, largely because of their inability to sympathize. They never venture into other people's perspectives and feelings, especially if they are opposed to their own. For instance, Lydia's complete lack of sympathy, after her elopement, for her sisters and her family, is symptomatic of a person who thinks only of herself and does not sympathize with others or try to envisage how her actions could be perceived by them. Therefore, Lydia remains a frivolous and selfish girl who fails to acquire virtues such as generosity, benevolence, or wisdom. The case of Jane and Mr. Bingley is more complex and could appear as contradicting a position that sees Austen as adhering completely to Smith's understanding

of mutual sympathy. Jane and Mr. Bingley are fully able to sympathize with others and to see their perspectives, however different from theirs. However, they do not evolve significantly over the course of the novel. How can they not be transformed by their confrontations with other's perspectives? I propose that despite their sympathetic behavior, Jane and Bingley, although sympathetic to *others*, do not reflect enough on *themselves* and their failings. Hence, they do not develop self-awareness through the comparison of their feelings and actions with the perception that another, impartial spectator, might provide. This can also be explained, on a psychological level, by their relatively indolent and passive personalities, which prevent them from becoming autonomous moral agents.³⁴⁷

However, Smith admits that the feelings of others are imagined by us based on our own values, and by our vision of the world, and thus they are not entirely consistent with what others are feeling; in fact, they might at times be erroneous. Austen, following Smith, points to the errors of interpretation one can make when he or she tries to represent what another might feel. However, she seems to believe, contrary to Smith, in the possibility that our subjective bias can be corrected through increased reflection, and more attention to others' gestures and speech.³⁴⁸ This possibility is illustrated perfectly in Austen's depiction, in *Persuasion*, of the long process through which Anne Elliot comes to understand the conflicted feelings of her previous lover, captain Frederick Wentworth. Anne Elliot and

³⁴⁷ This position recalls Marvin Mudrick's idea according to which simple personalities are unable to grow into adult moral agents because of a lack of self-reflection and self-awareness. On the special case of Jane and Bingley, see Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery*, 106.

³⁴⁸ Smith admits that we can change our perceptions and question our perspectives and values from a sympathetic movement toward the perspective of others, but he remains convinced of the subjective limits of this process. For him, our capacity to approve of another's feelings and opinions remains bound to a similarity of values and thoughts that cannot be entirely removed. The basis of our approbation with another's opinion relies on the possibility to find in it an accordance, however unseen at first, with our own. As he writes, "To approve or disapprove, therefore, of the opinion of others is acknowledged, by everybody, to mean no more than to observe their agreement or disagreement with our own" (Smith 12).

Frederick Wentworth were briefly engaged when they were very young, but Anne was persuaded by Lady Russell, an old friend of her deceased mother, whose judgment she trusted, to renounce him because he was poor and enrolled in a perilous and hazardous profession, the navy, where, even if he could enrich himself, he could also die and leave her a widow. Anne and Frederick parted, on her side, with much grief and sadness, and on his, anger and confusion. When the novel begins, it has been eight years since they broke off their engagement. Frederick Wentworth is now a captain; he is rich and has come ashore to look for a wife. Anne soon realizes that she will probably meet with him again, since Wentworth's sister, Mrs. Croft, has rented Kellynch Hall, her father's estate. Although she believes that her feelings have been subdued and her passion quite effaced by time, she is surprised to see these emotions resurging with great force at the simple idea of seeing him again. She dreads the encounter because she is convinced of his probable indifference to her. After all, if he "had wished ever to see her again, he needs not have waited till this time" (93). The only obstacle to their union has been his lack of money and situation. However, Anne realizes that when his situation improved, he did not come back to ask for her hand again. Interpreting his feelings from her own perspective, which is determined by her personal temperament, she therefore believes that, if he still loved her, "he would have done what she could not but believe that in his place she should have done long ago, when events had been early giving him the independence which alone had been wanting" (93). For Anne, the fact that he did not come to her sooner, means, necessarily, that he is "indifferent" (93) or "unwilling" (93) to see her. It does not occur to her that Frederick, being different from her, might have been too resentful and proud to claim her back, being convinced that he had been unjustly treated and still very angry at her. Using free indirect

discourse, Austen allows her readers to enter Frederick Wentworth's thoughts and thus reveals to them what Anne has not yet figured out definitely, that is, that Captain Wentworth is not indifferent, but rather angry and resentful, "He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She has used him ill, deserted and disappointed him; and worse she had shown a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure" (95). If Anne is not able to understand the amount of pride and resentment that motivates Frederick Wentworth's behavior, Wentworth has not made any efforts to really understand Anne's earlier motives to renounce him. This explains why he, governed by his wounded pride and averse to any attempt at sympathy, remains committed to a revengeful idea of her as weak and easily persuaded. Blind to Anne's perspective, he is also unable to understand himself clearly. His perception of his own sentiments remains clouded by his resentment. He tries to convince himself that she is not worthy of his notice, while at the same time it is her character that he has in view when he describes to his sister his ideal wife, who would possess "A strong mind, with sweetness of manner" (95). For her part, Anne is not able to sympathize with Wentworth, because she imagines his feelings based on her own temperament, which is more reflective and moderate. Wentworth is unaware of his own feelings for Anne and believes that he hates her because he is not able to distance himself from his own passions and to see things from Anne's point of view. Neither of them is able at the beginning to practice the reciprocal sympathetic movement that for Smith is necessary to a just moral judgment.

However, the process of mutual sympathy is slowly and gradually set in motion. Anne is soon confronted with odd gestures, which seem to betray a continuance of Wentworth's feelings for her. On these occasions, she is represented as astonished,

overwhelmed, and stunned by these close physical gestures, as if she cannot believe in Wentworth's partiality for her. This behavior comes as an entire surprise and, while it pleases her, she interprets it soberly as a faint remain of his earlier affection, not entirely extinct. He removes her turbulent nephew from her back and leads her to a coach when he perceives that she is tired of walking. No words are spoken between them on these occasions, but Captain Wentworth's actions bespeak of a real solicitude for Anne and demonstrates sympathy for her sufferings. As he renews his earlier affection for her through an increase of sympathetic feelings, she begins to acknowledge that he might still have some feelings for her. She tries to sympathize with his sentiments and convinces herself that she might even "underst[and] him" (120). For her, "He could not forgive her, —but he could not be unfeeling" (120). What he has done "was a remainder of a former sentiment; it was an impulse of pure, though unacknowledged friendship" (120). Even if Anne underestimates the real love Wentworth must feel for her, she goes so far as to admit that there is a friendship between them, which is more than she would have admitted before. Wentworth, for his part, cannot but sympathize with Anne's pain and suffering, even if he may still be angry at her. However, the path toward a real comprehension of each other's feelings and, for Wentworth, to an admission of his own feelings for Anne, needs a culminating point, a central crisis, which occurs when Louisa falls down the cliff at Lyme and remains in a coma for several days. During this time of crisis and panic, Wentworth measures Anne's value, her prudence, her sense, her self-control, and her capacity to listen to advice when it is sound, instead of being, like Louisa, headstrong and stubborn. For the first time since their reunion, he praises her publicly and even talks to her with warmth, which recalls for her the former days. As he begins to understand his own feelings and to

recognize her value, moving beyond his own particular feelings of resentment and anger, she recognizes in him a return of old sentiments, and an intimacy and friendship that recalls their past encounters. However, because of a melancholic and pessimistic tendency, she cannot suppose that he still loves her. She remains cautious and dubitative and therefore blind to his real feelings. As she explains, his praise of her was “a proof of friendship, and of deference for her judgment” (Austen, *Persuasion* 144), and when she recalls all that has passed between them at Uppercross and Lyme, she distinguishes in him “some instances of relenting feelings, some breathings of friendship and reconciliation” (147). The epiphany for Anne must wait until she and Captain Wentworth are reunited in Bath. There, his attitude toward her is entirely changed because he has become aware of his real feelings for her and has decided to let go of his resentment and ask for her. He still does not understand why she renounced him and let herself be persuaded so easily before, but he knows his own heart and recognizes her value. From his tone, his way of looking at her, his willingness to tell her his opinion about the inferiority of Louisa, and his defense of the strength of first attachments, she finally comes to the inevitable conclusion that “He must love her” (202). A complete understanding and a sympathetic grasp of each other’s feelings are demonstrated at the end of the novel, when Wentworth finally understands that Anne has always loved him and would have accepted him had he dared to propose to her two years after the first proposal, when his professional and economic situation had improved; he blames harshly his own pride and resentment as having deprived them of happiness for several years. He now understands that she was not weak, that she has acted out of prudence and duty, and that his resentment and anger was a fault that has served as the real cause of their shared misery. The novel is a testimony to the long and hard path that

individuals must take to develop true sympathy for each other, one that overcomes subjective limitations and biases; this process culminates in the attainment of a genuine understanding of the other's feelings, which in turn triggers a critique and a rectification of one's own prejudices. This sympathetic process can also occur within the individual and occasion in him/her self-awareness and change, as it does for Wentworth, who realizes that he still loves Anne and that he may have been wrong to be angry and resentful towards her.

The mutual process of sympathy between Wentworth and Anne also points to the possibility of going outside one's limited subjective perspective, to truly reach that of another. Significantly, this possibility is never mentioned by Smith. Smith's description of sympathy begins with the recognition of our incapacity to really experience another person's feelings and of the necessity to use our imaginations to form a conception of what this person might feel. He explains, "As we have no immediate experience of what others might feel, we can form an idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (Smith 4). Therefore, feelings of sympathy cannot, for Smith, "carry us beyond our own person" (4). If we can sometimes, for him, begin to understand the feelings of another, despite the fact that the ground of our apprehension remains based on ourselves and our personal tendencies and values, this feeling is always weaker than the "real" original one. Enclosed in ourselves, our personal feelings "are the standards and measure by which [we] judge others and by which others judge [ours]" (Smith 12). If Austen is aware of human beings' subjective limitations regarding their capacity to really the feelings and thoughts of others, she also demonstrates a belief in human beings' capacity to rise above their own personal perspective and truly experience what another feels and thinks. If she illustrates this intersubjective capacity

throughout her novels, she may have attained the best expression of it in *Persuasion*, with characters like Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth, who manage to overcome their prior subjective limitations and reach another person's true feelings, to see the world through his or her eyes, and even to correct their previous perceptions.³⁴⁹ Despite the fact that Austen generally agrees with Smith regarding sympathetic sentiments as often weaker than the ones actually experienced by sufferers, she also shows instances where the emotions share practically the same force and vividness on each side, as it happens when Wentworth perceives Anne's fatigue and swiftly helps her into the coach, or when Anne, discovering Mr. Elliot's true personality, anticipates with much uneasiness and distress all the potential vexations and disappointments her sister Elizabeth and her father would probably experience from such a man.

Finally, if sympathy for Austen is an important means through which humans can understand each other's feelings, judge of their appropriateness, and respond to them morally, it never attains for her the status of a cause or of a principle of the virtues, as is the case for Smith. For instance, Austen, like Smith, admires self-command as a cardinal

³⁴⁹ *Persuasion* is Austen's last novel. The author appears in this novel more mature in her understanding of human relationships and their difficulties, and she features a more mature heroine, than in her previous novels—Ann being twenty-seven years old. The minute analysis Austen gives of the long and difficult journey of two previous lovers towards a better understanding of each other's perspective through mutual sympathy is enriched by her own more advanced experience in life and, perhaps, the knowledge of her own declining health (*Persuasion* is published posthumously, in 1817). Being older, Austen is now in a position similar to Lady Russel's—a central character in *Persuasion*—being perceived as one to whom young relatives look to when seeking advice. In her preface to *Persuasion*, Linda Bree shows how Austen's own experience of counseling a young woman about marriage, is at the root of what will become her last novel. In contrast to Lady Russel, however, she positively refuses to give her opinion to her niece, Fanny Knight, regarding the question of marrying Mr. Plumptre. As she remarks, "Your affection gives me the highest pleasure but indeed you must not let anything depend on my opinion, your own feelings & none but your own, should determine this important point" (qtd. in Bree 7). For more on Austen's last novel, see Patricia Meyer Spacks ed., *Persuasion: A Norton Critical Edition*; Judy Simons ed., "*Mansfield Park and Persuasion*", Linda Bree ed., *Persuasion*.

virtue.³⁵⁰ Both seem to favor people who, in the face of sorrow and adversity, grieve in silence and attempt to be composed and calm before others. However, what makes self-control a virtue, and what constitutes its dignity, differs between Smith and Austen. For Smith, humans in general praise this stoic attitude and consider it a virtue because they can more easily sympathize with it than with “clamorous grief” (Smith 19) and “importunate lamentations” (19). According to Smith, someone who would lament and cry outrageously does not get much sympathy from people, because they are unable to feel such violent passions themselves and therefore judge it as excessive and inappropriate. It will therefore appear to them as a vice. As Smith explains: “he always appears, in some measure, mean and despicable, who is sunk in sorrow and dejection upon account of any calamity of his own. Why? We cannot bring ourselves to feel for him what he feels for himself” (Smith 43). This reasoning is based on Smith’s conception of mutual sympathy. For him, if we want others to sympathize with our feelings, it is better to adjust them to the level that might please an impartial spectator who does not feel any of these feelings. In the case of sorrow, we will gain sympathy from others only if we exert self-command and diminish the violence of our passions. For Smith, in brief, “if we consider all the different passions of human nature, we shall find that they are regarded as decent, or indecent, just in proportion as mankind are more or less disposed to sympathize with them” (22). Therefore, for him, self-command is not in itself, objectively, a virtue, or a personal excellence; rather,

³⁵⁰ In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen opposes the self-command of Elinor in the face of her sadness and grief to her sister Marianne’s complete indulgence in sorrow when Willoughby abandons her. The narrator clearly valorizes Elinor’s conduct in these circumstances and the narrative shows the dangers of overindulging in desperate and melancholic feelings. (It must be said, though, that Marianne’s sensibility is not altogether condemned by the author, but Austen insists on the necessity to regulate it through reason). Self-command is a virtue that is highly recommended by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. For him, it is this virtue which produces the most admiration among humans. As he writes, “What noble propriety and grace do we feel in the conduct of those who, in their own case, exert that recollection and self-command which constitutes the dignity of every passion, and which brings it down to what others can enter into!” (19).

it deserves the name of virtue uniquely because it generates sympathy, while overindulgence in passions does not beget any and is therefore considered a vice. Virtue is for Smith relative, while for Austen it seems to have an independent value.

For Austen, self-command in itself constitutes a virtue. It is not valued because it generates more sympathy than the opposite behavior. She even recognizes that some people simply have no sympathy for this virtue. In a way more subtle than Smith, she also distinguishes between genuine and factitious self-command, the latter of which is characterized by cold, dissimulated behavior. As she reveals in *Persuasion*, people like Mr. Elliot, who are overly guarded and impassive, never manifesting any spontaneous feelings, demonstrate coldness and reserve rather than self-command. As Austen suggests in her novel, self-command implies the possession of feelings. Mr. Elliot does not have any intense feelings to subdue; he is rather aloof and calculating. Therefore, he does not exhibit self-command. Nevertheless, many people sympathize with him and approve of his reserve. On the other hand, real self-command, of the kind Anne manifests after renouncing Wentworth, fails to incite sympathy in her nearest relations, apart from Lady Russel, who at least attempts to cheer her up by bringing her to Bath. This seems to demonstrate that Austen's valorization of Anne's self-command does not depend on the sympathy of other characters. This quality appears as objectively valuable. The reason for Austen's rejection of sympathy as the touchstone enabling a distinction between virtue and vice might therefore reside in her belief in its subjectivity and relativity. In *Persuasion*, she repeatedly demonstrates how a certain personality trait can be approved by certain people and not by others, and that what some people would call virtues may meet with little if any sympathy from a certain number of other people. In doing so, she is not advocating

for the relativity of the virtues, but rather indicating that mere sympathy is not a sufficient compass to determine what is virtuous or not. What her novels reveal is that feelings of sympathy are not to be regarded as equal. People who have wrong ideas about the world, based on conventions and prejudices, that is, people who do not reflect and are merely mimetic, cannot, for her, discern and appreciate real virtues. This is the case for Elizabeth, Mary, Sir Walter, and even Lady Russell, but it is not the case for Anne and Wentworth, as I will try to demonstrate.

Lady Russell is incapable of discerning Mr. Elliot's dubious and manipulative character, because she so entirely sympathizes with his good and polite manners, and with his title and fortune that she remains blind to the rest. On the other hand, she is unable to appreciate Frederick Wentworth's value, because he is deprived of fortune and situation, and because he manifests a frank, spontaneous, confident personality with which she cannot sympathize. However, the novel reveals that, in spite of his impetuosity, brilliance, and pride, Wentworth is a virtuous man. He is generous, courageous, compassionate, just, and dutiful, while the quiet Mr. Elliot, under his display of good manners and good breeding, is selfish, ungrateful, mean, unjust, and distrustful. This demonstrates that Lady Russell's judgment is sometimes wrong, and that we must not rely on individual sympathies and antipathies such as hers to form our idea of the moral value of an individual. Mrs. Clay and Mr. Elliot, who never betray any sign of strong passion, but are always on their guard, are not presented as models of virtue in the novel, even if they seem very pleasant and agreeable to Sir Walter and Elizabeth. From this we can confidently conclude that Elizabeth and Sir Walter's sympathies are not to be trusted when it comes to judging the virtues and vices of other characters. On the other hand, the widow

Mrs. Smith, an ancient schoolfellow of Anne's, who has lost her husband and practically all her money, and who lives poorly in Bath, sick and crippled, is regarded with admiration by Anne, who is impressed at how little she laments of her sorrowful situation and how cheerfully she seems to consider her life and enjoy her little occupations. While she is the object of Anne's admiration and induces in her a strong sympathy with her suffering and the way in which she bears it with courage and fortitude, none of these sentiments ever touch Sir Walter or Elizabeth, who consider Anne's visits to the poor widow as bizarre, improper, and even disgraceful. They show no sympathy for her and are even displeased by Anne's choice of visiting her instead of meeting important titled families in Bath, such as the Viscountess Darlymple, and her daughter, lady Carteret, to whom they are remotely related. However, there is no doubt in the novel as to who is judging the merits of Mrs. Smith correctly. It is not Elizabeth or Sir Walter, but Anne. If we were to base our judgment about Mrs. Smith's virtue solely on her general capacity to generate sympathy, the conclusion might have been different, since a lot of characters in the novel do not really care about her; in some instances, they despise her. As Marvin Mudrick has remarked, the novel adopts first and foremost the perspective of Anne, a perspective that is not without faults and errors, but which is, at its core, just and sound.³⁵¹ Anne's perspective is also presented by Austen as capable of correction and adjustment through reflection and receptivity to others. On the other hand, her father and her older sister's perspectives are consistently wrong, largely because they are incapable of reflection and openness to other's perspectives. We cannot but conclude that for Austen some perspectives are more just than others, and that the number of sympathies that a behavior begets is less important than the

³⁵¹ For Marvin Mudrick, "Anne is the heroine, the center of action, and the point of view of *Persuasion*," 218.

quality of the sympathizer. The cases of Mrs. Smith's and Mr. Elliot's virtues or vices, which can only be appreciated properly by people who have good judgment and taste, suggest a resemblance between Austen's moral perspective and Hume's aesthetic theory.³⁵² Austen seems to support Hume's idea according to which there is something like a standard of taste, not only in aesthetics, but also with regard to moral actions, and while everybody possesses a disposition to sympathize with others, to approve or disapprove of their feelings and actions, only a few can sense this properly and adequately and be regarded as setting the standards regarding virtues and vices.

However, even if Austen suggests that some people are able of more discernment in their sympathies than others, it does not follow, for her, that their sympathies *cause* the behavior of the person to be virtuous. In fact, these virtues may exist without incurring much sympathy, even from the people who are the most disposed to admire them. For instance, among all the instances in which Austen describes the virtues of Mrs. Smith, she never alludes to their capacity to be sympathized with as the reason they should be admired. She gives independent reasons for their value. These virtues are to be admired because they benefit the person who owns them and because they are useful to others. Their value is measured by the good effects they have on the person who possesses them, as well as on others.³⁵³ These virtues tend to promote happiness and utility, and to make one into a more

³⁵² In *Of the Standard of Taste*, Hume admits that some people are endowed with more delicacy of imagination, more practice in certain forms of art, and more experience in the contemplation of the fine arts than others. Possessing all these advantages, these persons must set the standards regarding what is beautiful or not. See David Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste*, 16-27. Austen seems to hold similarly that some persons who have more practice in the observation and reflection about human behavior, as well as sound judgment and more delicacy of imagination, such as Anne Elliot, should be regarded as setting the standards of virtue and vice.

³⁵³ Mrs. Smith is described by Austen as eager for conversation, cheerful, busy with her knitting, and able to find joy in a situation that is very much inferior to what she knew before. She renders herself useful and manages to find joy and entertainment by her conversations with her witty nurse. See Austen, *Persuasion*, 174-175.

dignified human being. However, they may not beget immediate sympathy. When she first renews her acquaintance with Mrs. Smith, Anne is astonished by the contrast between Mrs. Smith's situation and her cheerfulness. She therefore has difficulty understanding completely and thus sympathizing entirely with that surprising state of mind. However, she cannot but admire her friend's capacity to be happy and content in such a diminished condition. This "elasticity of mind" (174), which renders Mrs. Smith able to be cheerful and to turn all evil to good, is not something Anne could have been able to perform herself. When, under the persuasion of Lady Russell, she had renounced captain Wentworth, she felt dejected and depressed for a long time. The narrator reveals that "Her attachment and regrets had, for a long time, clouded every other enjoyment of youth; and an early loss of bloom and spirits had been their lasting effects" (67). She sunk gradually into a state of effacement and aloofness. While she shows fortitude, courage, and self-control, she cannot muster hope and cheerfulness. Her admiration for Mrs. Smith is therefore bestowed on qualities that she could not be able to display herself; it is not based on her capacity to feel the same cheerfulness in similar circumstances. Yet, she admires it and approves of it, however alien it may seem to her.

As this chapter has argued, in her novels, Austen engages extensively with important mid to late eighteenth-century philosophical themes and problems. First, she discusses the role devoted to the imagination in the production of knowledge and the formation of judgment. She recognizes the ability of the creative imagination to provide humans with schemas, types and images through which reality can be approached and understood. Secondly, she accepts sympathy's moral significance and envisages it in ways similar to Hume and Smith, as a receptive and imaginative faculty enabling humans to

understand each other's feelings and opinions, to respond to their own feelings, and to develop themselves as moral persons. Austen also defends the importance of literary fiction, notably novels, as a way to understand the world, pointing to the ironic dialogue between fiction and reality. However, while she insists on the importance of maintaining an ironic stance toward fiction and reality, and of standing in between the two worlds and comparing them, she also affirms the necessity of treating the existence, actions, and emotions of human beings as something real, to be dealt with, from a moral perspective. Austen argues for a moral belief in the world and in the existence of others, and for a commitment to reflection and action in this world, in spite of the epistemological doubts one may display with regards to its external reality. Moreover, her account of sympathy is not limited by subjective boundaries but suggests the possibility of a real understanding of others. She also provides an interpretation of the virtues that is objective and independent of individual and partial sympathy. In short, if Austen laughs at exaggerated fears and caricatured human portraits found in sentimental and gothic novels, she demonstrates at the same time the proximity of reality and fiction, when one is able to adapt and translate fiction to imagine a more regular and sober reality. Dismissing the phantoms of unreality and the terrors of the lonely, isolated self that were ever-present in Frances Burney and Anne Radcliffe's novels, Austen uses irony and the concept of moral obligation to respond to others' sufferings, to develop moral virtues, and to provide readers with the necessary attitude to navigate the world and respond to others.

Conclusion

My investigation into eighteenth-century British women novelists and their engagement, through the medium of the novel, with some of the central philosophical debates of the Enlightenment, brings about some important conclusions. The preceding chapters have looked at how popular eighteenth-century novelists Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Austen used the novel to illustrate and problematize important philosophical issues that were debated in their time. These women, each in their own particular way, explore what I have called the Modern Predicament, that is, the estrangement of the self from others and the world. Frances Burney illustrates the fractures and discontinuities of personal identity through social exclusion, cultural pressures, and madness, while Ann Radcliffe reckons with the emancipatory power of imagination and aesthetic sentiments to assert one's will, combat tyrannical power, and construct fraternal communities. Jane Austen, for her part, chooses to disclose the intimate and ironical relationships between reality and fiction, their interplay and intersection, as well as the necessity to see the world and others as real, because it is in response to them that humans develop self-awareness and moral virtues. It seems that women did participate in eighteenth-century philosophical debates in important ways that have not yet been recognized. An important conclusion of this dissertation is, therefore, that philosophical history has not taken into sufficient consideration the history of the novel, and, most precisely, eighteenth-century British women novelists' discussions on philosophical problems. In this sense, this dissertation serves as a contribution to feminist literary history, while also offering a possible rewriting of philosophical history as well.

As mentioned above, the philosophical issues treated in novels written by British women during the eighteenth century, can be related to the separation that occurred in

modern philosophy between the subject, others, and the world. As I have pointed out, this separation begets a sense of alienation from the world and a feeling of isolation from other humans, as well as a scepticism as to their existence and the possibility of really understanding and knowing them. Therefore, this dissertation has also demonstrated that eighteenth-century British women novelists take as a central theme an isolated and alienated self, showing how this self could experience tragic consequences and imagining ways in which such consequences might be overcome. While these women novelists were inspired by modern philosophers in many ways, they also debated and sometimes rejected their conclusions. For instance, the faculty of imagination, which was considered by modern philosophers such as Descartes and Locke, as a potential source of estrangement from the world, reinforcing the helplessness and alienation of the self, is presented in Ann Radcliffe's and Jane Austen's novels as a powerful source of reconciliation with the world and others. While Frances Burney, their precursor, seemed to agree with modern philosophers about the evils of unbridled imagination, she nonetheless drew on the concept of the imagination through her works of fiction to present readers with the "difficulties" of the female subject and the social pressures that can impede her from asserting her own identity in this world.³⁵⁴ The exploration and valorization of the role of the imagination regarding the human capacity to know the world and relate to others, seems to be a major contribution of eighteenth-century women novelists when compared with male philosophers.

³⁵⁴ Frances Burney's last novel is untitled *The Wanderer, or Female Difficulties*. As the title suggests, the novel is about the difficulties that women encounter in the world if they are deprived of fortune, name, birth, and male protection.

This leads to another important conclusion of this dissertation: that these novels, as a product of the imagination, can serve as an important medium of reflection, and as a complement to philosophical texts, one without which these texts might not reach complete exemplification and lose, from the perspective of the reader, some of their convincing force. As we have seen, novels are able to present to the reader's imagination possible situations involving humans, illustrating what it could be like to make choices and act in difficult circumstances where hierarchical distinctions and gender discriminations might greatly limit the individual's freedom. Thus, novels enable readers to open their minds to various situations, to understand other people's struggles and to access other people's minds and emotions, enlarging their own comprehension of human life. Irony, I have argued, is another mode through which the novel brings about a sort of detachment which is favorable to reflection. Irony enables readers to depart from their own perspectives and prejudices, to put the common view about things in perspective, and to examine everything that is said and thought by the character or the narrator, as something exterior to them that can be doubted or criticized. Austen and Burney are masters of this technique, especially in their use of heteroglossia and free indirect speech. By means of these literary techniques, philosophical ideas are embodied in different characters, through their unique ways of speaking, revealing their personal and social traits, as well as the nature of their thoughts. In Austen's novels, notably in *Northanger Abbey*, the narrator's voice also plays an important ironic role, through which the artificial and constructed nature of the novel, whose deep relationship with 'reality' is incessantly made clear to the reader. The power of the imagination is celebrated in Radcliffe's novels, where the emancipating potential of aesthetic emotions, such as the sublime, is presented as means to escape our enclosed

subjectivity and find the strength to combat oppressive powers. As a counter-power, these aesthetic emotions enable readers to feel what they would otherwise only understand, adding to their already acquired philosophical comprehension, the convincing force of aesthetic emotions.

A further important conclusion may be drawn from this dissertation and its central claim that British women novelists used the novel to discuss philosophical problems. It seems to indicate the historical existence, alongside male philosophical culture, of a women's literary tradition that intersects with the former to kindle new ways of understanding similar problems. In this tradition, the novel is regarded as a didactic tool and as a rightful site of philosophical reflection about human life which can disclose, according to Burney's, "the human heart, in its feelings and its changes" (*Camilla* 7). In this literary tradition, novels are envisaged as a "laboratory of the mind," that is, as an investigation conceived as a literary experiment where hypotheses are tested and where the reader plays an important role as the sympathetic receptacle of cognitive aesthetic emotions.³⁵⁵ I have surmised that this novelistic tradition, which began in the eighteenth-century, in England, has endured to this day, as each women author has responded to her predecessors, while trying out new ways of imbricating philosophical reflections in works of imaginary and literary fiction. Each of these women authors was aware of the ideas of her time and of the philosophical culture that surrounded her; she attempted to express these ideas and to criticize them through what seemed to her the most suitable medium.

³⁵⁵ I am referring here to the Catherine Z. Elgin's article, "The Laboratory of the Mind," published in *A Sense of the World. Essays on Fiction, Narrative and Knowledge*, 43-54.

This women' literary tradition, working alongside a similar male tradition,³⁵⁶ has served to elevate the novel, situating it as a necessary complement to philosophical thought, and as a work of intellectual value. The novel thus provides important knowledge about human life through concrete situations and characters, while also presenting real possibilities upon which to reflect. Working against the notion that the eighteenth-century novel was a superficial corruptor of minds, I have explored how eighteenth-century women novelists approached the novel as a very serious art form, capable of disclosing important truths about humans and the world. This novelistic tradition of course persisted into the nineteenth century, in the novels of the Brontës, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Margaret Oliphant, among others; and then into the twentieth century, with tradition perpetuating itself with important literary figures such as Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing, and extending into anglophone communities outside of England , with important authors such as Carson McCullers, Margaret Atwood, and Toni Morrison. Through time, this tradition has evolved, as novels have become less didactic, while still aiming at a representation of human life and the moral perplexities that may arise in the interaction of humans with others and the world. Further transformations have occurred with the increasing involvement of women in philosophy, which has tended to correct the previous imbalance in which, while women could contribute to literary discourse, they were largely excluded from philosophical debate, a domain reserved to men. Women have assumed the right to develop their thoughts in both philosophical and literary modes. As the case of a figure like Iris Murdoch shows, women can also occupy the dual role of philosopher and

³⁵⁶ There were, of course, also male novelists in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries who engaged with philosophical problems. Among them, one might identify Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, William Godwin, Charles Dickens, and William Thackeray. However, the difference is that novels were not for men their only medium to express philosophical ideas, since they could also produce important philosophical treatises.

novelist, using their novels to illustrate and problematize in a more concrete way the ideas they have developed in their philosophical essays.³⁵⁷

However, one must acknowledge that women rarely wrote philosophy in the eighteenth century, there were some who did. Among them, some wrote novels as well. In this sense, eighteenth-century women may also be regarded as pioneers in the process of mixing and reconciling the two often opposed traditions of philosophy and literature, suggesting ways these two domains can complement each other and work together toward a better expression of human life. One pioneer in this respect was Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote many essays, notably *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which was preceded by *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. She also wrote two novels, *Mary; A Fiction* and *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman*, in which she explores philosophical ideas about human rights, freedom, education, and the political situation of women. This tendency to unite philosophy and literature in one's work was not merely a British phenomenon.³⁵⁸ The exiled French author, Germaine de Staël, also wrote essays alongside her many novels, while being greatly influenced, when in exile, with German philosophers such as the Schlegel brothers. Her philosophical involvement includes works such as *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) and *De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations* (1796). She also wrote philosophical novels such as *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807) and *De l'Allemagne* (1813). Such women were

³⁵⁷ While not standing alone, one might say that Iris Murdoch is a paradigmatic example of a successful novelist and philosopher; in her works, these two domains of intellectual activity converge and are combined in fruitful ways. Her philosophical works include essays such as *The Sovereignty of Good*, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, and she has garnered praise for novels such as *The Bell*, *The Sea, the Sea*, and many others.

³⁵⁸ Among these women precursors, who worked in the fields of literature and philosophy, one can also find the British philosopher, also author of prose romances, essays, and poetry, Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), who engaged in important philosophical debates of the seventeenth century, both through philosophical essays and works of fiction.

predecessors to twentieth-century essayists and novelists such as Virginia Woolf, Iris Murdoch, and, in France, Simone de Beauvoir. The eighteenth-century women this dissertation has examined should therefore be understood as important precursors to such figures; they initiated a tradition of women's writing in which philosophical ideas were not only illustrated and problematized through fiction but also articulated independently in philosophical essays. In doing so, their works informed one another, contributing to the union of the two separate domains of philosophy and literature. It might therefore be fruitful to explore and bring to the fore what might be seen as a specific tradition in women's literary history which takes its root in the eighteenth century and continues to influence the ways in which novelists who are also philosophers combine these two domains of human thought and expression.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁹ A significant example of the vitality of this tradition today is the American philosopher and novelist Rebecca Goldstein, who wrote many novels among which figures *Thirty-six arguments for the existence of God: A Work of Fiction* (2010) and *Properties of Light: A Novel of Love, Betrayal, and Quantum Physics* (2000).

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