THEORY AND INTERPRETATION OF NARRATIVE
James Phelan, Peter J. Rabinowitz, and Robyn Warhol, Series Editors
Literary Identification
from Charlotte Brontë
to Tsitsi Dangarembga

Laura Green
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This book seeks to account for the persistence of a particular genre of realist fiction, the novel of formation, from nineteenth-century English through contemporary Anglophone literature. Through readings of novels by nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century women writers, as well as of memoirs, essays, and interviews that record reading experiences, I argue that this genre reproduces itself through the elaboration of bonds between and among readers, characters, and authors that I call, collectively, “literary identification.” These connections begin but do not end with a reader’s recognition of aspects of her- or himself in a fictional character. Forms of literary identification may also extend beyond the boundaries of the text to create relationships between readers and authors. Particular literary identifications may be limited by historical and cultural change or difference, but themes and rhetorical structures that foster literary identification continue to undergird the novel of formation in new and evolving contexts.

I have preferred “novel of formation” to the still common though contested term “Bildungsroman.” With its origin in late-eighteenth-century German literary culture and Romantic criticism, the term Bildungsroman trails a history of debates, distinctions, and categories, many of which never applied comfortably to nineteenth-century English fiction and which are even less appropriate to Anglophone fiction of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The nineteenth-century English authors I discuss, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, may have been influenced by the
Enlightenment and Romantic German models to which the term initially refers, but the twentieth- and twenty-first-century authors draw on other literary influences (including, but not limited to, those English forebears) in extending the tradition in different social and national contexts. “Novel of formation” is the alternative phrase used by, among others, Marianne Hirsch, who proposed it some years ago as “a neutral term, free of prior critical associations” (295). I have also preferred it to the phrase “novel of development” because, as the readings below will show, while the protagonists of these novels are always depicted at formative—self-constructing or self-defining—moments, their continued psychological development is sometimes withheld, incomplete, or cast into question.

To the extent that the term Bildungsroman, even when used outside its original Romantic context, associates the genre with Enlightenment culture, with European literary traditions, and with a normatively male authorship (beginning with Goethe), it also fails to reflect the prevalence, in the English and Anglophone literary tradition, of female-authored and female-centered fictions of individual formation whose trajectories differ from the masculine model of Bildung or apprenticeship while nevertheless continuing a recognizably related project of narrating the formation of a self in relation to a world of others. The past several decades have seen the consolidation of a critical and pedagogical canon of novels of female formation. More recently, queer and postcolonial novels of formation have begun to recast the conventions and concerns of both the initial European tradition and the revisionary female canon. While critics often signal these developments by the addition of modifiers such as “female,” “postcolonial,” or “counter” to the term Bildungsroman, at this point, even such compound phrases seem to concede unnecessary defining authority to superseded historical conditions and literary conventions. As the European history of the form has not been discarded but rather sublated and transformed in contemporary iterations, so the “novel of formation” includes and expands beyond the genre of the Bildungsroman and its critical history.

I conceive of the novel of formation, in other words, as a capacious genre, potentially including any novel whose focus is the mental and moral growth of a character, within a specific social situation, who is positioned as the novel’s central consciousness. Novels of formation, as my examples illustrate, have since the early nineteenth century been a dominant English, and later Anglophone, genre, which has continued to adapt and transform itself in postmodern and postcolonial contexts. The narrative’s larger arc may move from early childhood to the brink of maturity (as in George
Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* and Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*), or it may be restricted to the events of a year or two in adolescence (as in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*). The protagonist may dominate both plot and point of view (as in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*) or share the stage with characters who approach her in importance (as in *Nervous Conditions*). Novels of formation may be narrated in the first or the third person, ignore or incorporate events in the public sphere, and end in marriage, death, the discovery of vocation, or inconclusion. The mood of a novel of formation may be one of rebellion (as in Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*), confusion (as in Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*), disaffection (as in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*) or despair (as in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*). Often implicitly or explicitly building on authorial experience (as do all of these examples), the novel of formation shares many narrative characteristics with more directly autobiographical genres.

Within these broad boundaries, novels of formation share some defining characteristics. A genre emerging within nineteenth-century fictional realism, the novel of formation assumes both the singularity and coherence of the self and the facticity and totality of the social world. The social world, in turn, includes other singular and coherent selves as well as events that are causally and consequentially related in space and time. The selfhood of a protagonist may, in the course of a narrative, be assailed and fractured (mental breakdown and illness are frequent hazards), and the significance of other people or events may appear chaotic or obscure. But the aimed-at, even if not fully achieved, coherence of the subject and the essentially causal relations between people and events give the novel of formation its characteristic structure. Because these relations are most visible retrospectively, the novel of formation is not only a representation but perhaps more important a history of the effects of persons and events, private and public, on the subject whose formation it narrates.

The broad generic range that I ascribe to the novel of formation is narrowed in this study by a focus on novels of formation written by and about women. Novels of formation are and have been written and read by men and women, and the gender of readers and the trajectory of their identifications are not predicted or exhausted by the gender of a novel’s author or protagonists. Men may identify with female protagonists in novels written by men or women, and vice versa. Nevertheless, to point to identification and the formation of the self in the context of both literature and psychoanalytic theory—the discipline on which I draw in using the term “identification”—is to invoke processes to which gender identity has been and
remains central. In the novel of formation, as in the classic psychoanalytic narrative, the self always forms as a *gendered* self, although the protagonist’s experience of gender may be neither simple nor satisfactory.

To a significant though not exclusive degree, the exemplary self of the novel of formation is gendered female. As Nancy Armstrong has influentially argued, the rise of English domestic fiction not only disseminated the gender ideology that emphasized separate spheres for women’s experience (subjective, private, organized around sexual and social reproduction) and men’s (active, public, organized around the accumulation of financial or political power) but also established the psychology of the female subject as the bourgeois norm: “The modern individual was first and foremost a woman” (8), particularly, perhaps, as a subject of discursive representation. As the Germanic Bildungsroman tradition, initially indicatively male, encountered and was partly incorporated by nineteenth-century English domestic fiction, a genre developed whose exemplary protagonists, along with its readers and its writers, increasingly were women.

Since the normative cultural narrative of female formation, throughout the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century, culminated in marriage, plots of courtship and marriage dominated novelistic representations of women’s experience from the eighteenth century (e.g., Richardson, Burney, and Austen) onward. Novels of courtship center on a moment at which the protagonist’s romantic career commences, generally cover at most a year or two of her life, and minimize the importance of childhood experience or formation. While they may represent their period of focus as one of transformation for the protagonist, courtship novels ultimately emphasize a change in her circumstances rather than in her mental or moral interior. In Samuel Richardson’s novel *Pamela*, for example, the heroine’s virtue, never in question, finally triumphs over Mr. B’s assumption of droit de seigneur; in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennett’s superior merits similarly enable her triumph over the vulgarity of both her mother’s low relations and her husband’s lofty ones. Although Elizabeth renounces a mistaken attitude—“Vanity, not love, has been my folly. . . . Till this moment, I never knew myself” (137)—this self-recognition takes the form of a single, plot-driven *éclaircissement* (the letter from Darcy revealing her misunderstanding of his and Wickham’s relationship) rather than of a prolonged internal evolution. By the time Darcy proposes, Elizabeth has retreated from this initial vehemence of self-blame, insisting only that “the conduct of neither, if strictly examined, will be irreproachable; but since then, we have both, I hope, improved in civility” (240). By what will come to be the conventions of the novel of formation, such an “improve[ment],”
at the level of “civility” rather than morals, hardly registers as change or growth. Courtship plots in novels of courtship are less about the formation of selves than about, to borrow the final words of *Pride and Prejudice*, “uniting them” (298)—the heroine and her appropriate mate—in ways that largely reinforce other unities, such as those of class, and that produce a sense of resolution.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, plots of formation begin to reshape, though not to eliminate, the courtship plot. The novel of formation absorbs the courtship-and-marriage plot as just one, often contested, element of its protagonist’s ethical and intersubjective challenges. In a novel of formation, events emphasize change over time, rather than sudden revelation, and the working-out of the courtship plot exceeds or even opposes a social “truth, universally acknowledged” about the necessity of marriage as its end. Novels of formation expand the narrative lens so that the concentrated moment of romantic or marital choice is not the sole crisis for the female protagonist; while that crisis may remain important to the resolution of her narrative, it occurs in the context of a larger web of self/other relations and other conflicts. As Susan Fraiman observes, novels of female formation “insist that personal destiny evolves in dialectical relation to historical events, social structures, and other people” (10).

*Jane Eyre*, appearing at the beginning of the Victorian period, is a generic as well as a chronological boundary case: Like predecessor narratives by Richardson or by Austen, it features a prominent and triumphantly resolved plot of courtship and marriage, and a heroine whose virtue is rewarded. The courtship plot, however, is interwoven with extensive, independent attention to the protagonist’s childhood and to adult relationships other than those with Rochester; and Jane’s retention of her chastity is represented not as a sign of her impregnable virtue but rather as the outcome of an emotionally costly psychological struggle.

More radically, courtship plots in novels of formation may fail to resolve themselves in marriage or any other form of unity. Writing about the Victorian “failed-marriage plot,” Kelly Hager makes this point about courtship plots more generally: “All English novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth century do not, in fact, end with the marriage of hero and heroine, and the domestic novel does not always establish closure and ask its readers to believe that society has thus been stabilized” (12). In nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century novels, such a failure often comes about as the result of a natural tragedy (the flood of *The Mill on the Floss*, the shipwreck in *Villette*, the fever of *The Voyage Out*) that gives symbolic form to the protagonist’s irresolvable conflict with social norms (particu-
larly gender norms) or her ambivalence about marriage itself. In narratives of female formation from the twentieth century and after, it is possible to imagine alternatives to marriage other than death: the narrative may suspend questions of courtship by attenuating its temporal moment, focusing, as in *Nervous Conditions*, on a preadolescent moment; de-emphasize courtship in relation to other aspects of self-formation (intellectual in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*; political in *The Book of Not*; vocational in *Lucy*); or focus on non-normative (e.g., queer) forms of courtship not resolvable in marriage (as in *The Well of Loneliness* and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*).

This is not to deny, however, that nineteenth-century (and many Modernist) novels of formation are shaped by a powerful and widely disseminated ideology of sexual difference and complementarity. As Armstrong has claimed, “the gendering of human identity provided the metaphysical girders of modern culture—its reigning mythology” (14). One of the most profound results of this “mythology” for women and the novel of formation is that, as Fraiman points out, “The female protagonist’s progress, at least until the twentieth century, is generally contingent on avoiding the abyss of extramarital sexuality, on successfully preventing ‘things’ from happening to her. Her paradoxical task is to see the world while avoiding violation by the world’s gaze” (7). This is the “abyss” that Jane Eyre so dramatically avoids. But, as that novel suggests, the taboos on direct representation of women’s sexuality or desire, as well as the ideological confinement of women within domestic space, could produce as well as circumscribe narrative. Jane’s efforts to repress and avoid her desire for Rochester, for example, lead her to elaborate moments of self-assertion and provide an opportunity for the elaboration of other kinds of intimacies, such as her various relationships to the Riverses.

Nineteenth-century novelists themselves frequently reflected on the aptness of such psychologized female protagonists as subjects for modern narratives of formation. In *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot’s narrator invokes such a distinction between female interiority and male activity:

While Maggie’s life-struggles had lain almost entirely within her own soul, one shadowy army fighting another, and the slain shadows forever rising again, Tom was engaged in a dustier, noisier warfare, grappling with more substantial obstacles, and gaining more definite conquests. So it has been since the days of Hecuba, and of Hector, Tamer of horses; inside the gates, the women with streaming hair and uplifted hands offering prayers, watching the world’s combat from afar, filling their
long, empty days with memories and fears; outside, the men, in fierce struggle with things divine and human, quenching memory in the stronger light of purpose, losing the sense of dread and even of wounds in the hurrying ardor of action. (308–9)

The feminine action “inside the gates” moves inside the soul in Eliot’s novel, which can evoke the “shadowy army” of Maggie’s psychomachia with more detail than it musters for Tom’s “substantial obstacles.” By the time Henry James explicates his similar choice to center *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) on something so apparently insubstantial as “a young woman affronting her destiny,” in order to “show what an ‘exciting’ inward life may do for the person leading it even while it remains perfectly normal” (10, 17), his labored defense is already belated. Not only Eliot, but also before her Richardson, Austen, Brontë, and Gaskell, and after her Hardy—to round up only some obvious suspects—had by the 1880s demonstrated thoroughly “how absolutely, how inordinately, the Isabel Archers, and even much smaller female fry, insist on mattering.” They not only embody an affective world of struggle and choice but also adumbrate its further evolution. In Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1887), it is Tess, the female protagonist, who experiences “feelings which might almost have been called those of the age—the ache of modernism” (124).5

While gender norms may be more varied, less explicitly invoked, or more explicitly resisted in twentieth- and twenty-first-century novels of formation, self-formation continues to be represented in gendered terms—in relation to some norm of gender expression—even if other aspects of identity may also be important. In focusing my analysis within those terms, my aim is not to delineate a separate female tradition but rather to trace within the genre of the novel of formation one of the trajectories of identification that subtends it—a relay of reading and recasting that travels partly along a network of shared, deeply felt, but not exclusively defining gender identities. The novels I discuss themselves exhibit doubled or divided ends: the representation of shared features of women’s formation as subjects, on the one hand, and a conception of subjectivity as fundamentally individual, on the other. While they represent the individual’s formation, and obstacles to it, as specifically gendered, they also implicitly and explicitly insist that their female protagonists’ experience and emotions have a claim on the human universal. Gender identity is often, but not always, the most prominent aspect of self-construction and trajectory of identification represented in these narratives; other group-level aspects of identity, such as sexuality, race, class, or national belong-
ing may be equally or more important; the narratives may not address an exclusively or predominantly female readership; and they may draw to varying degrees on conventions of realism. Nevertheless, in their representations of the formation of female characters through relations of identification, in their invitations to readers to identify with those narratives through shared experiences and psychic structures of gender, and in the readerly and authorial identifications with other women’s narratives embedded within them, these novels reproduce, across almost two centuries, certain rhetorical strategies and challenges. Without denying difference and distinction, I hope to demonstrate the continued importance of the novel of formation to writing by women, and of identification to the novel of formation.

In unfolding these claims, I draw on more than thirty years of study of English narratives of female formation from the points of view first of feminist, lesbian, and ethnic studies and latterly of queer and postcolonial studies, beginning with such foundational works as *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Formation*, edited by Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. Studies of such fictions from the 1970s and 1980s often emphasize the deviation of narratives of female formation from a human norm and fictional tradition identified as masculine, white, European—the norm still called to mind by the term “Bildungsroman.” For more recent critics, the contributions of several decades of feminist analysis, as well as the continued production of fictional narratives of female formation, have dislodged the authority of masculine narratives of formation sufficiently that they no longer provide a central reference point for the discussion of female development. Despite these differences, the work done by several generations of feminist critics has enabled me to take for granted in my own study that representations of female formation, ranging across literary-historical and national boundaries (e.g., among Victorian, Modern, and contemporary literatures, and among English, European, and postcolonial texts) and among works by canonical, emerging, and popular authors, present a broad and varied scope of inquiry in themselves, without needing to be set in relation to a presumptive masculine norm. My study is thus organized not by questions of gender difference but by a focus on the paths of transmission, through the identification of readers in a variety of circumstances with characters and authors. I highlight relations of identification in, and around, novels of formation by women, beginning with the nineteenth-century English novel and extending across its continental and colonial spheres of influence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, uncovering the shared narrative features of
a multivalent and multidirectional tradition through what I call “literary identification.”

By the term “literary identification” I mean to indicate an occurrence emerging from the encounter of the psyche of a reader and the rhetorical construction of a narrative by its author. “Identification” and its cousin “sympathy” have been used casually, often interchangeably or in tandem (as in common references to “sympathetic identification”), in twentieth-century literary criticism and theory to describe a reader’s involvement with the represented emotions of a fictional character, her willingness to animate a fictional character’s actions and relationships with her own affects. I intend my use of the term to be more focused, drawing (as detailed in the following chapter) on the model of subject formation proposed by Freud and later developed in different directions by twentieth-century schools of psychoanalytic thought and by many feminist and queer literary theorists. I use “literary identification” to indicate three ontologically distinct kinds of relations depending on the interaction of real and fictional female subjects: relationships between characters within novels; responses of readers to characters rhetorically invited by the text or actually recorded elsewhere (in other texts); relations between readers and authors sponsored or mediated by textual representations. My terminological expansiveness is intended to capture the intricate relations among readers, characters, and authors of the novel of formation, and the way in which these roles can be transferred through identification. None of these forms of literary identification fits the model of a Freudian “primary” identification, that is, an early, unconscious, and preverbal relation. These literary identifications are, in Freudian terms, “secondary” or “partial,” rhetorically constructed and accessible to consciousness, but, I contend, they can powerfully mimic, supplement, and shape the reader’s relations with real (non-textual) as well as fictive others.

The text is the arena in which these relations occur; the reader is the subject who identifies, whether with a textually represented character or with the figure of the author. In some cases, the reading subject may also be the object of representation, as in autodiegetic memoirs, such as Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s Ruined by Reading (discussed in the next chapter) or Beauvoir’s Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, or at moments within novels, as in the case of Maggie Tulliver’s reading in The Mill on the Floss (discussed in Chapter Two). In these cases, the force of the term “reader” is more or less unproblematically deictic: the reader is Schwartz or Beauvoir or Maggie. But difficulties arise in speaking more generally of, say, “the reader” of The Mill on the Floss, where the definite pronoun implies a
normative or paradigmatic figure. Where does the norm come from; who establishes the paradigm? If it is the critic, might she not be mistaking her own (particular) reading habits and responses to a text for those of the (abstract) figure of “the reader” of that text? She might turn to testimonial or studies of actual readers, as Janice Radway does with great subtlety in *Reading the Romance*, a pioneering ethnographic study of reading and identification in the particular genre of the romance. As Radway suggests, however, her study is ultimately an investigation of “the way romance reading as a form of behavior operated as a complex intervention in the ongoing social life of actual social subjects” (7)—that is, empirical readers and the way they interpret their activity of reading a particularly homogeneous genre. She observes of her interviewees, “Because the women always responded to my query about their reasons for reading with comments about the pleasures of the act itself rather than about their liking for the particulars of the romantic plot, I soon realized I would have to give up my obsession with textual features and narrative details if I wanted to understand their view of romance reading” (86). Is it possible to posit an abstract figure of “the reader” in the context of a more heterogeneous set of texts, distributed more broadly in space and time, while maintaining a critical orientation toward the rhetorical features of text itself?

Reader-response theory and some strains of narratology have attempted to hypothesize such abstractable readers who can be posited as the subjects of an act of reading not only in default of but even in distinction from embodied, socially located readers. The most relevant set of such terms for my purposes are those that posit readers in the first instance as rhetorical effects of the text; examples include the “implied reader” the “mock reader,” and the “narratee.” Like the “reasonable person” of legal discourse, these fictional subjects attain their analytic purity at the expense of social, physical, or psychological specificity. They pose difficulties for analyses interested in situated or transactional accounts of reading—ones in which readers are particular subjects located within particular cultural, political, or affective situations. On the one hand, there is no necessary correspondence between even the most painstaking critical construction or textual projection of a reader and the situation or experience of any actual reader. As James Phelan points out, “As anyone who has followed the reader-response movement even in passing must already recognize . . . different readers bring different subjectivities to texts and therefore sometimes have different experiences of the same textual phenomena” (231). On the other hand, there must always be at least one actual reader present to recognize the textual address to or construction of the reader—that is,
the critic. Forming a data set of one, the critic will always run the risk of oversampling his or her own competencies and responses in hypothesizing those of a model reader. This limitation may have political and ethical consequences, since particularly situated critics might read into, or out of, the text the impact of subjective differences, such as those of gender. Patrocinio Schweickart, for example, observes, “It is but a small step from the thesis that the reader is an active producer of meaning to the recognition that there are many different kinds of readers, and that women—because of their numbers if nothing else—constitute an essential class. Reader-response critics cannot take refuge in the objectivity of the text, or even in the idea that a gender-neutral criticism is possible” (38). Even the “essential class” of women readers is itself not indivisible, and the figure of “the woman reader” runs the same risks of totalization as the figure of “the reader” itself.

To conceptualize “the reader” abstractly, in other words, can often be tendentious rather than illuminating. And yet, as Phelan goes on to point out, “to celebrate difference and argue for the incommensurability of different accounts of the reading experience . . . though it has the advantage of validating different responses, has the significant disadvantage of endorsing a prison-house of subjectivity” (231), making it difficult to generate any hypotheses or speculations about reader response. If concepts such as “the implied reader” risk reducing the reader to an epiphenomenon of the text, affective, identity-based, or political approaches risk subordinating the text to the experiences of individual readers or classes of readers. To navigate between the rock of overgeneralization and the hard place of overspecification, Phelan proposes an account of the reader as a unique subject but one addressed and positioned in particular ways by generalizable rhetorical performances of a given text. To describe this reader, he turns to the concept of the “authorial audience” posited by Peter Rabinowitz, on which I shall also draw.

Rabinowitz’s tripartite construction of the reader begins with the “actual audience”—the “flesh-and-blood people who read the book.” As Rabinowitz points out, this is the audience over whom the author has the least “control,” since “each member of the actual audience . . . reads in his or her own way, with a distance from other readers depending upon such variables as class, gender, race, personality, training, culture and historical situation” (20–21). This fluctuating, asymptotic “actual audience” is functionally replaced, in Rabinowitz’s paradigm, by the “authorial audience.” The authorial audience is “some more or less specific hypothetical audience” (21; emphasis in original) constituted by its recognition and
“acceptance of the author’s invitation to read in a particular socially con-
stituted way that is shared by the author and his or her expected readers” (22). This “invitation” can be facilitated by the presence within the nar-
rative by a third, separate but overlapping, set of readers that Rabinowitz calls “the narrative audience” (95)—another hypothetical audience, for whom a novel’s data are not fictional but “real.” In The Mill on the Floss, for example, the “authorial audience” shares Eliot’s familiarity with the plots and cultural status of Madame de Staël’s novel Corinne and Sir Wal-
ter Scott’s novel Ivanhoe, as well as Maggie Tulliver’s familiarity with the conventional fates of literary heroines (and probably corresponds quite
well with a sizable contemporary “actual audience”). The “narrative audi-
ence” knows these things and additionally “knows,” along with Maggie Tulliver, that her ontological status (as a “real” person) differs from that of Corinna or Ivanhoe’s Rebecca (as fictional characters). (I discuss this example further in Chapter Two.) The acceptance of this distinction by the narrative audience encourages the authorial audience to accept it as well.

Rabinowitz’s model enables him to navigate between overspecification
of the reader (Phelan’s “prison-house of subjectivity”) and underspecifica-
tion (for example, what Schweickart identifies as the “pretense of gender-
nuetral criticism”). Relatedly, the model’s transactional nature—according
to which relations between readerly interpretations and authorial inten-
tions, as embodied in texts, are mediated by a shared context of literary
conventions—keeps simultaneously in view the text, the reader, and the
social situation of both. Rabinowitz’s actual/authorial/narrative distinc-
tion locates the reading transaction across the three levels that are key to
my own analysis: within the text, where the narrative audience, as I will
argue, often models the kinds of reading the reader should do (or avoid);
within the reader, who is the object of the text’s invitation to read in a par-
ticular way, and who has the power to accept or reject that invitation (and
sometimes to testify, in her own acts of authorship, about her acceptance
or rejection); and within the author, conceived of less as a biographical
subject than as an ethical or aesthetic intention behind the arrangement
of the text—the sender of its invitation, the other party to the transac-
tion. In what follows, when I speak of “the reader,” I will most frequently
have in view a version of Rabinowitz’s “authorial audience.” I have also
taken the liberty of adapting Rabinowitz’s “narrative audience” to my
purposes. Like Rabinowitz’s, my narrative reader is located within the text
and instantiates its epistemological assumptions, but she does so litera-
	ly by being a reader. That is, the “narrative reader” in my analysis will refer
to those characters in the text who model the act of reading for the autho-
rial reader. I also choose to speak of the “reader” rather than the audience, since part of the invitation of a novel of formation is to make the authorial reader feel addressed more individually and intimately than the word “audience,” with its collective and theatrical implications, suggests.

In fact, the term “identification” calls to mind a particular unit of intimacy—the pair. As their titles—“Coming Together,” “Coming Apart,” and “Coming Out”—suggest, each of the three main sections of this book is partly structured by intimate intersubjective encounters among pairs. The first, introductory, chapter outlines the way in which these intimate encounters are constructed and analyzed within some strands of psychoanalytic theory. In settings ranging from provincial Victorian England to pre–World War II Paris to late-colonial Rhodesia, the three narratives of the second chapter, “Coming Together,” dramatize questions about the ethical relations between self and other through the psychological oscillations of identification and disavowal between women with close ties and shared ambitions. In the third chapter, “Coming Apart,” the protagonists share, also across different temporal, geographical, and political circumstances (nineteenth-century Europe, the twentieth-century United States, and post-independence Zimbabwe), the trauma of not being recognized as subjects, but rather mobilized as representations of abject otherness, a distorted mirror image, by more fortunately situated other women. And the fourth chapter, “Coming Out,” considers three twentieth-century novels of formation that both invite and deflect relationships of queer identification among characters and between readers and authors.

The pair in a different sense—the textual pair—has become a prominent feature of literature syllabi and scholarly analysis over the last several decades, encouraged by critical and literary developments. Postmodern writers and critics have found in the revision of canonical works of literature a method of revelation and critique, often giving voice to previously obscured subjects—for example, Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), whose revision of *Jane Eyre* quickly became part of the feminist pedagogical canon; J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986), which revisits *Robinson Crusoe*; Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* (1997), which recasts *Great Expectations*; Michael Cunningham’s homage to Virginia Woolf and *Mrs. Dalloway* in *The Hours* (1998). Julie Sanders suggests that “in the late twentieth century, as the postmodernist movement developed its own interest in metafiction and writing which acknowledged its sources in a more explicit and deconstructive mode than previously, the Victorian era offered a diverse range of genres and methodologies to examine and appropriate” (122). Such revisions, as theorists of adaptation suggest, offer intrinsic textual
pleasures—“the tension between the familiar and the new, and the recogni-
tion both of similarity and difference, between ourselves and between
texts” (J. Sanders 14)—that, because they provide their own context, may be more easily conveyed in the classroom than certain kinds of liter-
ary history or critical methodology. Further, students often want to read
contemporary literature, even as English departments continue to value
knowledge of canonical texts. Pairing classic texts and contemporary adaptions answers the wishes of both groups.

From a critical perspective, however, the very familiarity of the pair, its aptness for relations of comparison and contrast, can limit its inter-
pretive effects. The high-relief of comparison and contrast can, certainly, be revelatory. The juxtaposition of Jane Eyre and Wide Sargasso Sea in Gayatri Spivak’s seminal essay “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” for example, makes vivid the dependence of Jane’s subject-
tivity, as a British proto-feminist proto-citizen, on Bertha Mason’s com-
plementary disintegration, as the “native” female unworthy of human inclusion. As Julie Sanders observes, “The study of appropriations in an academic context has in part been spurred on by the recognized ability of adaptation to respond or write back to an informing original from a new or revised political and cultural position. . . . Many appropriations have a joint political and literary investment in giving voice to those characters or subject-positions they perceive to have been oppressed or repressed in the original” (98). But such comparisons can also enshrine hierarchical relations between texts. Juxtapositions of earlier exclusions and later voic-
ings of textual “others” (Brontë’s Bertha Mason, Defoe’s Friday, Dickens’s Magwich) can easily shift from analysis of prior textual and ideological assumptions to disdain for their apparent inability to see what is clear to present-day readers. It is perhaps to work against such a smug teleology that Spivak, having drawn a sharp contrast between Brontë’s and Rhys’s representations of Bertha Mason/Antoinette Cosway, triangulates her reading, closing with a third novel, Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818). Frankenstein has a less directly intertextual relation to either of the other novels than they do to each other, but in Spivak’s analysis it is the ante-
cedent author, Shelley, who provides the most suggestive critique of the liberal-imperial project of “soul-making.”

Against the potential Manichaeism of the pair then, my study is also structured by the figure of the trio. Dyadic interactions between characters are counterposed with triangulated relationships among authors, charac-
ters, and readers; likewise each chapter analyzes intertextual relationships among not a pair but a triad of texts. These triadic groupings, I hope,
will disrupt hierarchies that might array texts according to relationships of priority and belatedness, origin and imitation, error and correction. The relationships among texts, as I will emphasize, are not unidirectional or even reversible (as a paired model cannot help suggesting) but rather multidirectional and sometimes indirect. Though the overall arc of the study moves from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first, the texts are grouped together on the basis of their intertextual relations rather than by literary historical periods (which also are three: Victorian, Modern, postmodern). I hope this syncopated chronology makes visible the novel of formation’s own struggle with a logic of chronological unfolding: the projection of a version of a future self enabled or impeded by identification with a version of a past self. I also wish to emphasize the extent to which struggles over the role, effect, and limits of identification—among characters, between reader and character, between reader and author—are not new developments (i.e., of Modernist reflexivity or postmodern metafictional practice) but have marked the novel of formation from early in its career. Relationships of identification in the novel of formation, both of characters within novels and of readers with their characters and authors, have always been vexed. Protagonists who struggle with their existential debts to characters who embody developmental alternatives; narratives that indict the social inequities shaping psychological opportunities; authors ambivalent about the readerly identification they encourage—these effects of the novel of formation recur across centuries and in new contexts.

In the sense that literary identification has something to do with the way that the novel of formation as a genre reproduces itself, the final triangulation of this study might be that of my phrase, “literary identification,” with two more familiar terms: “influence” and “intertextuality.” What analytic or categorical shifts does my new term enable? In essence, I have attempted to steer a middle course between strongly author-centered, psychoanalytic accounts of authorial influence (such as those of Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s feminist revisions of Bloom’s model in *The Madwoman in the Attic* and *No Man’s Land*) and author-decentering, poststructuralist accounts focused on intertextual relations, such as those of Roland Barthes (“The Death of the Author”), Julia Kristeva (*Desire in Language*), and Gérard Genette (*Palimpsests*). The concept of the author—and not just of the author, but of selves in general, including characters within the work—seems inevitably central to the novel of formation. Regardless of the actual or apparent degree of overlap between events in the author’s life and those in the
protagonist’s, the biographical structure of a novel of formation emphasizes the significance of singular authorship to the life story. Readers of novels of formation may project beyond the text an author who becomes an object of identification; and authors may return the projection. Yet these relations between biographical authors and “actual” readers, whether instantiated (e.g. in letters or meetings) or not, do not supersede relations of readers to characters, or of texts to their precursors. Rather, all these vectors of intimacy, on different ontological planes, compose the web of readerly and intertextual relays whose effects I hope to capture under the heading of “literary identification.”
There were some books I wanted to possess even more intimately than by reading. I would clutch them to my heart and long to break through the chest wall, making them part of me, or else press my body into them, to burrow between the pages. When I was eight I felt this passion—androgynous, seeking both to penetrate and encompass—for *Little Women*, which I had read several times. Frustrated, I began copying it into a notebook. With the first few pages I felt delirious, but the project quickly palled. It was just words, the same words I had read over and over; writing them down did not bring me into closer possession. Only later did I understand that I wanted to have written *Little Women*, conceived and gestated it and felt its words delivered from my own pen. . . . I did not want to feel and think like Louisa May Alcott, however, or even to know more about her. I wanted to write my version of *Little Women*, what Louisa May Alcott would write were she in my place, or if I were she, yet living my life. (Schwartz, *Ruined by Reading* 67)

This passage from Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s memoir, *Ruined by Reading: A Life in Books* (1996), demonstrates concisely many aspects of literary identification. The first aspect is the centrality of representations of literary identification to the diegesis of narratives of formation, both fictional and autobiographical: here, Schwartz’s youthful possession by a novel of
formation, Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868–69), introduces her narrative of her own formation as a reader. The second is its aspirational trajectory: although Schwartz may, like many young readers of the novel, have identified with Jo March, she represents herself here as identifying not with any of the novel’s characters or immediately with the author, but rather with what she understands (without having any particular biographical information) the author to represent: a proleptic authorial self, a future Lynne Schwartz who inhabits the possibilities adumbrated by Alcott.1

At the same time, the passage exhibits as its third characteristic a quality of recursiveness in tension with that project of self-formation, drawing the reader into a narrative *mise-en-abîme*. Schwartz identifies with the authorial presence of Alcott; at the beginning of *Little Women*, Alcott herself advertises her own prior identifications, in a “Preface” that consists of twelve lines of verse adapted from the second part of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*: “Go then, my little book, and show to all / That entertain and bid thee welcome shall, / What thou dost keep close shut up in thy breast; / And wish what thou does show them may be blest / To them for good” (preface). This part of *Pilgrim’s Progress* narrates the pilgrimage of Christian’s wife, Christiana, and their children, suggesting that in producing her own didactic novel of female coming of age, Alcott imagines herself as writing what Bunyan might have written, were he Alcott, and living her life. Beneath the attempts of the subject to project herself in the future as an agent of narrative runs a current that threatens to pull her back into subjection to textual representation.

Finally, Schwartz and Alcott together illustrate the association, not definitive but definite, of literary identification with an aesthetic identified with middlebrow or popular culture and with female and young readers. Many novels of formation belong simultaneously to, or migrate among, high-culture canons, pedagogical canons, and what Catharine Stimpson calls “paracanons.” The paracanon, Stimpson suggests, “embraces both canonical and non-canonical works. In this respect, it is like a ‘women’s tradition,’ which, in English, includes both a George Eliot and the silly female novelists she despised” (965). Taking *Little Women* as her exemplary paracanonical text, Stimpson observes that such a text “may or may not have ‘literary value,’ however critics define that term. Its worth exists in its capacity to inspire love. . . . We are grateful to the beloved text for being there. If it were not, how might we connect with it? Even cathect to it?” (958). The “cathexis” to which Stimpson here refers is one aspect of what I am calling “literary identification”—the passionate sense of connection to the text that “seek[s] both to penetrate and to encompass,” to
inhabit the text and to create it. This association of literary identification with readers and reading practices conceived of as “passionate” rather than reflective has obscured the complexity of literary identification as both a response and a textual property.

Schwartz’s title teasingly and ironically invokes eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anxieties (discussed further below) about the reading of fiction as a practice that, inflaming the imagination, can “ruin” the reader—especially the female reader—in the same way that women can be “ruined” by erotic knowledge or experience. In Ruined by Reading, on the contrary, Schwartz both downplays the power that such analyses impute to affective reading and credits it with being not the ruin, but the making, of her. “If no girl was ever ruined by a book,” she asserts, “none was ever saved by one either” (114). This sounds dismissive, but only a few pages later, Schwartz affirms: “All the reading I did as a child, behind closed doors, sitting on the bed while the darkness fell around me, was an act of reclamation. This and only this I did for myself. This was the way to make my life my own” (119). Here, it is the act of reading itself as much as the content of what is read—the independent choice to direct her attention toward, and invest her emotions in, these objects and not others—that transforms Schwartz into a “self.”

The fictional selves that Schwartz grows up to “make” as a writer testify to the productive rather than the ruinous impact of literary identification. Readers of Ruined by Reading likely know that the child passionately transcribing Little Women will become a novelist, one whose work includes novels of formation and domestic fictions that might well be described as “what Louisa May Alcott would write were she in my place, or if I were she, yet living my life.” But Schwartz’s twentieth-century novels redirect the conventional nineteenth-century associations among intellectual curiosity, erotic experience, and female “ruin.” Schwartz’s early novel Leaving Brooklyn (1989), for example, is a retrospective narrative of the first-person protagonist’s ambivalently experienced seduction, in her fifteenth year, by a Manhattan ophthalmologist. The undisguised erotic curiosity of the protagonist, Audrey, is linked to her intellectual exploration as an avid reader: “What I was doing now,” she reflects about their sexual encounters, “what was being done to me, was as vivid and insistent as any book and gave the same relief of arrival at a resting place, a bedrock reality. It was even like a book, with new passages rolling through me rhythmically, each bearing its multitude of sensations” (74). This sexual transgression wounds and alters her but also releases her into adult life as a writer: “I left Brooklyn. . . . I didn’t become an actress in the end, but
instead this I who makes up stories” (145). It does not bring about the “ruin” associated with illicit sexuality in nineteenth-century novels such as Anna Karenina, which Audrey reads on the subway ride home from her last visit to the doctor, and adumbrated even in juvenile literature such as Little Women, in which Jo March’s pseudonymous career as a writer of sensational short fiction causes her to “delve[] in the dust of ancient times for facts or fictions so old that they were as good as new, and introduce[] herself to folly, sin, and misery, as well as her limited opportunities allowed” and thus “begin[s] to desecrate some of the womanliest attributes of a woman’s character” (396). This decline is halted by the disapproving intervention of Professor Bhaer, at whose behest she burns her manuscripts and whom she ultimately marries. (The burning or other destruction of the protagonist’s books, by or at the behest of an authority figure, recurs as a topos: we will encounter it in Brontë’s work, in Kincaid’s, and in Winterson’s.) Jo’s sister Amy, similarly, gives up her ambition of becoming an artist, and Laurie Lawrence, the girls’ suitor (and ultimately Amy’s husband) gives up his of becoming a composer. Alcott solicits her authorial readers’ identification with artistic ambition, but she ultimately redirects that identification toward the inhibition of artistic in favor of social (familial) reproduction.3

Jo’s attempt to write herself into an identity that is not hers (literally, since unknown to Jo, the newspaper editor is willing to publish her work because “one of his hacks, on being offered higher wages, had basely left him in the lurch” [348]) anticipates Schwartz’s attempt to occupy the position of authorial privilege represented by Little Women itself. But the difference between their responses to the shadow of sexual “ruin” demonstrates that authorial interdictions can come to function, perversely, as incitements. As Schwartz represents it, the shape of her identification with Alcott’s words—“clutch[ing] them to my heart and long[ing] to break through the chest wall, making them part of me, or else press[ing] my body into them, to burrow between the pages”—almost parodically exemplifies the kind of assimilative identification that Freud variously identified as primary, narcissistic, or melancholic, in which the ego wishes “to incorporate this [lost] object into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it” (qtd. in Barzilai 118). But its ultimate impact is more conscious and more productive than this representation suggests. In Leaving Brooklyn, Schwartz teases the reader with the possibility that the narrative of “libidinal development” is itself a convention as much as a revelation. If Audrey’s early seduction transformed her into “this I who makes up sto-
ries,” then perhaps the story of the seduction is itself made up. As Stimpson suggests, “Generations of female readers, lucky enough to have books, have maneuvered themselves around Alcott’s most obviously constrictive maneuvers. They have continued to tutor themselves in unfeminine will through choosing which parts of *Little Women* and which Jo they will imitate, or, at the very least, find enchanting. Recidivists of reading, they return again and again to the far naughtier beginning and middle of the narrative” (969). Beyond the disappointment of *Little Women*’s characters (who give up their art) and its author (whose own less conventional life disappears into her moralized representation), a reader like Schwartz identifies with, and refuses to lose or let go, the image of authorial power that Alcott cannot quite disguise: the power to *produce the moral*—which is also the power to revise, reject, or replace it.

The relationship to Alcott that Schwartz recalls thus illustrates the ambivalent nature of literary identification. My study contends that, while novels of formation may not ruin or save their readers, they do attempt, through relations of identification, to counsel them; that their counsel points to the limits, as often as it exploits the pleasures, of identification; and that the chain of narrative identifications into which they introduce their readers—in which authors become characters, characters become readers, and readers in their turn become authors—may be productive as well as recursive and may serve to inaugurate new narrative directions as well as to reproduce old narrative patterns.

**UNDERSTANDING LITERARY IDENTIFICATION**

Connections between novel-reading and affective response, in particular identification with literary characters, accompany the emergence of the English novel out of the various literary fields of the eighteenth century. That identification with others is a central feature of the self and of social relations and that it is in the first instance a *narrative* function of imagination—a story we tell ourselves—were propositions central to the theories of eighteenth-century philosophers of mind such as David Hume in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Taking Hume’s discussion of the limitations of sympathy as a lens through which to “reveal[] why fictional characters were uniquely suitable objects of compassion” (168), Catherine Gallagher argues that the novel as a genre coalesces around the philosophical question of how far and how deeply identification and sym-
pathy can extend in our relation to fictional others. According to Gallagher, fictional characters elicit identification precisely because a fictional character is “nobody”—no real person—and therefore makes no demands on the reader’s sympathy that might run counter to any material interest: “Fiction, then, stimulates sympathy because, with very few exceptions, it is easier to identify with nobody’s story and share nobody’s sentiments than to identify with anybody else’s story and share anybody else’s sentiments... Nobody [i.e. a fictional character] was eligible to be the universally preferred anybody because nobody, unlike somebody, was never anybody else” (Nobody’s Story 172; my emphasis). Gallagher concludes that “A similarly strong sense both of the impediments to sympathizing with other actual people and of the attenuation of otherness as a result of sympathy lies at the heart of the novel’s most important formal trait: its overt fictionality” (173). Both identification with imaginary others, then, and a fictional character’s (“nobody’s”) life story as a locus for that identification, are central to the novel.

The rise of the novel and its encouragement of emotional involvement with overtly fictional others aroused cultural anxieties as well as enthusiasm. The same feature that could make fiction didactically useful—its emotional appeal—could also make it dangerous, especially when addressed to those readers whose emotional lability was understood to be greater than their powers of reasoning—women, children, and later working-class readers. Kate Flint has traced the nineteenth-century history of the association among women, the novel, and identification in English culture, noting that “the woman reader was expected [by nineteenth-century critics and educators], according to the terms of the contemporary psychological and physiological tenets which stressed her innate capacity for sympathy, to find it far easier than a man would do to identify with characters and incidents from her reading material” (38). This impressionability made novel-reading alluring and also dangerous for women readers. Flint quotes the Victorian conduct writer Sarah Stickney Ellis in The Mothers of England: “A novel read in secret is a dangerous thing; but there are many works of taste and fancy, which, when accompanied by the remarks of a feeling and judicious mother, may be rendered improving to the mind, and beneficial to the character altogether” (qtd. in Flint 83). In this conjunction of secrecy, danger, and female readers, we see the apprehension of moral “ruin” by reading to which Schwartz alludes.

Through the nineteenth century, then, the experience of identification was increasingly associated with the novel and its particular power, whether for good or ill. William Hazlitt was more positive about affec-
tive responses, including identification. He criticizes French tragic drama (which he approaches largely as a form of narrative rather than performance) by asserting that “The true [dramatic] poet identifies the reader with the characters he represents; the French poet only identifies him with himself. . . . We never get at that something more, which is what we are in search of, namely, what we ourselves should feel in the same situation” (qtd. in Heller 98; my emphasis). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hazlitt had already begun to construct a European canon of fiction, or “good novels and romances” (in which category he included Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, Lesage’s *Gil Blas*, and works by Fielding, Richardson, and Scott), asserting that “there are few works to which we oftener turn for profit or delight” (Hazlitt 6: 106), and he had already begun to locate readers’ affective response to fictional characters at the heart of that canon.5

With such encouragement, by the beginning of the Victorian period the general stigma attached to novels and the overtly affective reading styles they fostered had been redirected toward specifically disfavored genres, defined sometimes by subject and style (Gothic novels and their descendants, “sensation” and “New Woman” novels; French novels; “shilling shockers”; newspaper serials and “railway novels”); by the readership associated with them (e.g., working-class, “mass,” and female readers); and by the methods and motivations of their consumption (such as Ellis’s novels read “in secret”). Elevated above these genres, readers, and motivations to a mode of social critique as they were by Charles Dickens or of ethical instruction as they were by George Eliot, novels could be viewed as appropriate reading for cultivated readers of both sexes and could be harnessed to the more general project, perceived as increasingly urgent, of enlightenment through the spread of a demotic literary culture. Readers’ identifications with fictional others in this context could represent not a residue of disfavored sentimental affect but rather a positive resource for the cultivation of morality.

This possibility is both suggested and delimited in Eliot’s well-known manifesto for realist fiction in “The Natural History of German Life” (1856):

*The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. . . . A picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment. . . . Art is the nearest thing*
to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. (Selected Essays 110)

In Eliot’s essay, the individuated emotional responsiveness to literature that Hazlitt describes as “something more . . . what we ourselves should feel in the same situation,” is brought out of the realm of aesthetics and into that of ethics, “amplified” beyond its immediate source in the literary experience to become “the raw material of moral sentiment,” that is, the foundation of a moralized fictional realism.

To this moral sentiment Eliot famously attaches the word “sympathy,” which develops in her conception from a largely innate faculty to a strenuously cultivable moral achievement. The paradoxical result of Eliot’s elevation of sympathy in fiction, however, is that in her novels, the recognition of similitude (identification), which had previously been important not in itself but as the a priori basis of sympathy, takes over as a primary effect of the reading experience. The route to this transformation is complex. In embracing sympathy as the basis for the development of a morally directed fictional realism, Eliot needs to dissociate it from the other more overtly didactic sentimental forms of fictional representation in which it flourished. In “The Natural History of German Life,” she does this by attacking as sentimental and melodramatic Dickens’s sympathetic representation of working-class altruism:

But for the precious salt of his humor . . . [Dickens’s] preternaturally virtuous poor children and artisans, his melodramatic boatmen and courtesans, would be as noxious as Eugène Sue’s idealized proletaires in encouraging the miserable fallacy that high morality and refined sentiment can grow out of harsh social relations, ignorance, and want; or that the working classes are in a condition to enter at once into a millennial state of altruism, wherein everyone is caring for everyone else, and no one for himself. (Selected Essays 111)

Eliot suggests that Dickens falsifies these characters, and therefore the reader’s emotional response to them, in two ways. On the one hand, when it is possible simply to assimilate characters (such as “poor children and artisans”) to middle-class conceptions of virtue and the displays of “high morality and refined sentiment” on which authorial readers might pique themselves, Dickens does so, an elimination of difference that eases identification and thus the extension of sympathy. On the other hand, char-
acters for whom assertions of similarity might be rejected—“courtesans and boatmen”—become melodramatic spectacles of difference. Judging themselves, and judged by others, according to standards they do not meet, they would like to be like us but are not; they appeal to our sympathies through their self-abjection at the spectacle of their own difference. Thus Little Em’ly in David Copperfield, seduced by Steerforth, first hopes that he will “[bring] me back a lady” (419)—that she will become like the reader in (imputed) social class and virtue. When, instead, her sexual fall conventionally destroys the possibility of likeness between herself and the virtuous reader, Em’ly can reassert her claim to sympathy only by making herself the author of her own chastisement: “Oh dear, dear uncle, if you ever could have known the agony your love would cause me when I fell away from good, you never would have shown it to me so constant . . . but would have been angry to me, at least once in my life, that I might have had some comfort!” (661). In her disavowal of her former self, Em’ly becomes realigned with the moral values that her readers are supposed to hold, while maintaining the reassuring social and ethical distance indexed by her narrative banishment to Australia.

The problem with such methods for establishing sympathy, from Eliot’s point of view, is that with either the elimination or the exaggeration of differences between readers and characters, readers’ existing habits of feeling and response are not challenged, and the representations don’t have the effect of “amplifying our experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.” As Rachel Ablow suggests (in a discussion of Eliot’s propensity to create pain for her characters), “Insofar as sympathy threatens to make the other into merely an extension of the self—or the self into an extension of the other—it is inimical to” the creation of ethical relationships (71). For Eliot, “amplification” and “extension” mean not the emotional amplification of the sentimental tradition or the depiction of out-of-bounds experiences such as those of melodrama but rather a greater immersion in and openness to ordinary feelings and events—in short, in what we have come to know as fictional realism. This program leads to the creation of characters such as the Rev. Amos Barton, who embodies “the eighty out of a hundred of your adult male fellow-Britons returned in the last census, [who] are neither extraordinarily silly, nor extraordinarily wicked, nor extraordinarily wise,” who yet “bear a conscience, and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right; . . . have their unspoken sorrows, and their sacred joys” (36, 37). Eliot remains aware, however, that readers are likely to require direct authorial intervention to sympathize with
characters such as Amos Barton (as with, later, Edward Casaubon); and her convictions never fully exempt her from some “idealized” portrayals of “artisans” (think of Adam Bede or Felix Holt) and flashes of the “melodrama” associated with “boatmen and courtesans” (Caterina Sarti and her dagger in “Mr. Gilfil’s Love Story,” the actress Laure stabbing her husband onstage in *Middlemarch*), that sometimes illuminate them.

Particularly in her major female protagonists, Eliot develops an alternative model of readerly involvement that elicits readerly identification *as against* sympathy. Eliot devotes her most detailed character portrayal and analysis to characters such as Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke, whose primary concerns are with their relations with others and who demonstrate considerable complexity—including error, confusion, hesitation, and doubt—in the development of those relations. These protagonists are represented, *inter alia*, as readers of texts, but as important, they are represented as “readers”—interpreters, analysts—directly of persons and relationships. These characteristics align them with the reader herself and magnify the moral importance of “reading” in both senses. Further, climactic moments of these characters’ development always include powerful demonstrations of sympathy with others—such as Dinah Morris’s solicitation of Hetty Sorrel’s confession and Dorothea Brooke’s visit of marital counsel to Rosamond Vincy—that suggest the attitude toward others that will ideally emerge from such reading.

At the same time, Eliot overwhelmingly emphasizes the difficulty, even the anguish, for her protagonists of achieving such sympathy. When Maggie Tulliver, having resigned her claim on Stephen Guest, assures the abandoned Lucy Deane that Stephen “will come back to you,” Eliot describes these words as “wrenched forth from Maggie’s deepest soul, with an effort like the convulsed clutch of a drowning man” (*Eliot, The Mill on the Floss* [hereafter *MoF*) 510]. Because Maggie, the protagonist, with whose moral and emotional development the reader has detailed familiarity, is depicted as experiencing even greater emotional pain than the ostensible object of sympathy, the less fully drawn Lucy, the function of sympathy here is to reinforce, rather than transform, the authorial reader’s experience of identification: It is Maggie, not Lucy, we mourn for; it is her agony in inflicting pain, not Lucy’s in feeling it, that we experience. Despite Eliot’s insistence on sympathy as the basis of moral art, to the very degree that she succeeds in drawing a reader into the intellectual and emotional processes by which her protagonists develop their sympathies with others, identification tends to remain in tension with, rather than ground, the sympathetic response.
Nevertheless, if Eliot ends up separating a nascent conception of identification (not named as such) from sympathy and emphasizing a tension between them, both responses still function for her—as they did for Dickens—in the service of a primarily ethical conception of the self. An important ethical and structural shift in conceptions of sympathy and identification occurs at the end of the nineteenth century, via Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. Freud begins to systematize a theory of identification—naming it, attempting to disentangle it from sympathy, and further moving the narrative of subject-formation out of the prescriptive, deontological realm of the “ought” and into the descriptive, aspirationally scientific realm of the “is.” As Diana Fuss writes, “[For Freud] identification replaces ‘sympathy,’ ‘imagination,’ and ‘suggestion’ to describe, in more ‘scientific’ fashion, the phenomenon of how subjects act upon one another” (4). Subjects can “act upon one another,” of course, in a variety of ways, but the “act[ions]” encompassed by the terms “sympathy” and “identification” are foundational and paradoxical relations that both define a self, or subject, as separate from the other and link the subject inescapably to the other. In Fuss’s succinct formulation, Freudian identification is “the detour through the other that defines the self” (6). Freud’s conception of identification revises the direction of self-other relations posited in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of sympathy. According to these theories, identification, underlying sympathy, allows us to reach out to selves outside our own, and thus at least implicitly maintains the value of the other. According to Freud’s theory, identification allows us to bring others inside us—to assimilate or introject them, a direction that does not require a particular ethical stance toward, or attachment of value to, the other.

Freud’s ideas about identification are formulated and revisited in a number of essays over many years, including *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), and *The Ego and the Id* (1923); as his many interpreters and critics have noted, there is no single, systematic theory of identification. Shuli Barzilai, for example, observes that

Freud . . . did not provide a definitive and systematic description of this mental operation in his writings. Quite the contrary, his usage over the years is richly nuanced and also abounds in inconsistencies. . . . As variously described by Freud, identification could be any of the following: primary (the earliest form of emotional tie), regressive (the object-choice is introjected back into the ego), narcissistic (the self is taken as
a model), and hysterical (the patient’s symptom expresses an unconscious assimilation of the experiences, usually sexual, of other people).

(113)

Most generally, Freud is inconsistent about whether and when identification is fundamental to all subjects or characteristic of pathological ones, and whether its origin is drive-related (internal to the subject) or relational (founded on the social orientation of the subject). What is important for my purposes is not the specific content of Freud’s conflicting formulations but rather a particular tension in the conception of the subject that they instantiate, which, I will argue, also structures the narrative of the self in novels of formation. That tension is between a concept of subject as fundamentally autonomous, developing in the context of social relations but established previous to or apart from them, and a subject as fundamentally social, relationally shaped from its earliest moments and in its deepest recesses.

Stephen Mitchell, in an important synthesis of later twentieth-century “relational-model theories” (such as British object-relations and various American interpersonal schools), describes how they shift Freud’s emphasis: “Freud views mind as fundamentally monadic; something inherent, wired in, prestructured, is pushing from within. Mind for Freud emerges in the form of endogenous pressures. Relational-model theories view mind as fundamentally dyadic and interactive; above all else, mind seeks contact, engagement with other minds” (3). Against this monadism, however, many theorists, including Freud himself, have noted the foundational populousness of the Freudian psyche. “In the individual’s mental life,” Freud writes, describing identification at the beginning of Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, “someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology . . . is at the same time social psychology as well” (1; my emphasis). Tim Dean asserts, more dramatically, “As his theory of identification became progressively complex . . . Freud saw more than four people in even the most conventional coupling. No longer a question of constitutional bisexuality but of an individual’s identifications with and ambivalence toward his or her parents of both sexes, every sexual encounter involves multiple generations, as well as multiple ghosts. The Freudian bedroom is a densely populated space. We might say that when classical psychoanalysis pictures people having sex, it can’t resist conjuring a gang bang” (141). The shaping presence of others in the individual psyche does not quite make Freud’s conception of the self fundamentally
relational in Mitchell’s sense, in which “embededness is endemic to the human experience—I become the person I am in interaction with specific others. The way I feel it necessary to be with them is the person I take myself to be” (276). While populous, the Freudian psyche is not necessarily sociable. Rather, it is precisely because they maintain, in their very inconsistencies and conflicts, an emphasis on the tense but utterly central relationship between “the person I am” and “interaction with specific others” that Freudian as well as more consistently relational psychoanalytic models of subject-formation can be employed to capture the tense dynamics of identification in narratives of formation.

If psychoanalytic subjects, viewed through a relational lens, share with fictional protagonists a narrative construction that emphasizes interactions of the self with others, they also share the feature of being embeded in retrospective narratives that retrace those interactions in order to understand the subject’s formation. Peter Brooks, for example, suggests that “the kind of explanation in which psychoanalysis deals is inherently narrative, claiming an enhanced understanding of the present—and even a change in it—through histories of the past” (47–48). Freud himself is notoriously ambivalent about this unscientific resemblance between case history and novel. “There are many physicians,” he concedes, “who (revolting though it may seem) choose to read a case history of this kind [i.e., Dora] not as a contribution to the psychopathology of neuroses, but as a roman à clef designed for their private delectation” (Freud, Dora 23). “Revolting” though such a reading may be, in Freud’s narrative interpretations of memories, dreams, fantasies, and case studies, the patient’s “symbolic positionalities” and obscure desires acquire imaginative mises-en-scène; Brooks suggests that Dora “reads as a kind of failed Edwardian novel, one that can never reach a satisfactory dénouement” (50).12 As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen observes, “Even in its crudest, most stereotyped forms (as in his ‘Child is Being Beaten,’ for example), a [Freudian] fantasy unfailingly calls up an entire scene complete with protagonists—dramatic personae—and plot. This minimal dramatization is simply amplified in dreams that rework the material of unconscious fantasy, in the fantastic genealogies of ‘family romance,’ in the stories of daydreams, and also in literary fiction, which originates, according to Freud, in fantasy” (17).13 Perhaps reflecting his uneasiness about the relation of psychoanalytic to literary, rather than scientific, narrative, Freud’s own theoretical accounts of the generative relationship between fiction and fantasy are notoriously simplistic. In “Creative Writers and Daydreaming,” for example, he chooses to focus on what Stimpson might call “paracanonical” literature:
Not the writers most highly esteemed by the critics, but the less pretentious authors of novels, romances and short stories, who nevertheless have the widest and most eager circle of readers of both sexes. One feature above all cannot fail to strike us about the creations of these story-writers: each of them has a hero who is the center of interest, for whom the writer tries to win our sympathy by every possible means and whom he seems to place under the protection of a special providence. . . . It is the true heroic feeling, which one of our best writers has expressed in an inimitable phrase: “Nothing can happen to me!” It seems to me, however, that through this revealing characteristic of invulnerability we can immediately recognize His Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every daydream and of every story. (9–10)

Freud here represents literary identification as the occasion for crude wish-fulfillment. But as his own interpretations of his patients’ “daydream[s] and stor[ies]” suggest, it is not always “immediately” easy to reveal their traces of “His Majesty the Ego”; and the expectation of fantasy that “Nothing can happen to me!” is disappointed, in the case histories as well as in novels, more frequently than it is fulfilled.

Important reconceptualizations of Freudian identification have emerged from feminist and queer psychoanalytic, literary, and cultural studies. Beginning in the 1970s, English, French, and American feminist psychoanalytic theorists, such as Juliet Mitchell, Hélène Cixous, and Nancy Chodorow, placed pressure on the gendering of identification and desire within the Freudian Oedipal narrative, the place at which, for Freud, both emerge. As Freud represents it, identification at the Oedipal stage is above all a recognition of gendered sameness and difference. Ideally, for Freud, identification operates symmetrically with object-choice, or desire, within the scenario of the Oedipal complex, to produce a heterosexual orientation: the subject identifies with (wishes to be) the parent of the same sex and orients his or her desire toward (wishes to have) the parent of the opposite sex. For the male child, this process requires sublimating an initial rivalry with the father for the mother’s love into an identification with the father and a desire oriented toward women who will replace the mother. For the little girl, on Freud’s account, the process is more complex and indirect, requiring her to accept an identification with the inferior (“castrated”) position of the mother and orient herself toward the male who can supply her with a replacement for the penis in the form of a baby. Feminist psychoanalytic writers such as object-relations theorist Nancy Chodorow and the Lacanian Jane Gallop developed paradigms
that made the female subject central and transvalued her complex relations of identification to the mother (Chodorow) and the father (Gallop). Feminist literary theorists such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar and Margaret Homans drew on psychoanalytic models to consider the complexities of literary identification and influence for female readers and writers in a male-defined literary canon.

Beginning in the 1980s, a further challenge to the Oedipal model of the opposition of identification and desire emerged from psychoanalytically inflected queer theory. Freud concedes that the “normal positive Oedipus complex” (The Ego and the Id [hereafter EI] 29), with its binary gendered and heterosexual outcome, is by no means the most likely resolution of the “Oedipus situation,” which is complicated by its “triangular character . . . and the constitutional bisexuality of each individual” (26). Whether male or female, the child has available alternative objects (male and female) of identification and desire, and there is no prima facie reason to suppose that he or she will assort them in the ways that produce a “normal positive” outcome or that identification and desire are mutually exclusive responses to the other (EI 29, 26). Freud temporizes about how the Oedipus complex and its identifications do produce a gendered outcome: “In both sexes the relative strength of the masculine and feminine sexual dispositions is what determines whether the outcome of the Oedipus situation shall be an identification with the father or the mother” (EI 28). Freud tends to present such observations as minor qualifications that do not significantly alter the logic of his argument; but in this case, since “masculine and feminine sexual dispositions” are what Freud presents the Oedipus complex as producing, it is unclear what can ground the prior existence of those “dispositions.”14 Judith Butler, Diana Fuss, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Kaja Silverman, and Michael Warner, among others, have taken up the tautologies, contradictions, and gaps in Freud’s account of identification, using them to produce alternative versions that erode the boundaries between masculine and feminine and between homo- and heterosexual identities and that thus call into question the naturalization the heterosexual subject and the “heterosexual matrix” anchored by that subject. This aspect of queer theory has not abandoned the Freudian account of the subject as produced by identification and desire, or of those affects as grounded in kinship, but it has dislodged the heterosexual subject, female or male, from its position as embodying the identity formation in relation to which other identities are imitations or aberrations.15 This conceptual shift brings into view not only the expressly queer subjects of some of the twentieth-century and contemporary narratives
of formation in this study, including Radclyffe Hall’s *Well of Loneliness* and Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, but also the ambiguity and inconclusiveness of gendered and sexual subjectivity in narratives not ostensibly or primarily queer, such as *The Mill on the Floss*, Virginia Woolf’s *Voyage Out*, and Simone de Beauvoir’s *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*.

As productive as dislodging identification and desire as the grounding of a “heterosexual matrix” has been questioning the very distinction between the two forms of the subject’s relation to an other. In a discussion of Freud’s characterization of identification in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, for example, Eva Badowska suggests that

The introduction [by Freud] of the distinction between “having” and “being” has a twofold effect. Its positive effect is to draw attention to identification as a form of being; as the very ground of subjectivity. But its negative effect . . . is to insist that identification must—had better—be different from object-cathexis, even as identification is construed [by Freud] as an “emotional tie.” . . . Notwithstanding Freud’s nice formula for distinguishing between object-love (“having”) and identification (“being”), the notion of identification as “emotional tie” undercuts the possibility of such distinctions by revealing that identification too is a way of “having”—relating to, or loving and hating—an object. Despite Freud’s protestations, identification and desire, like two ghosts, occupy one place and keep fluidly morphing into one another. (966, 967)

In Badowska’s account, identification and desire “fluidly [morph]” into one another at such a rate that the distinction threatens to vanish altogether. Badowska cites Borch-Jacobsen’s post-structuralist rereading of Freudian identification: “Following René Girard (1965), [Borch-Jacobsen] believes that desire has no essential connection to an object and is essentially mimetic.” In Badowska’s words, the aim of the wish expressed by desire is no different from that expressed by identification—to occupy the place of another as a way of fulfilling “a wish to be a subject, to position oneself and one’s desire” (960). This metapsychological point does not, presumably, deny a felt distinction for the subject between alignments of self and other that are experienced as primarily erotic (desire) and those that are experienced as primarily emulative (identification). It does suggest that these experiences are not mutually exclusive—or even easily separated. It also suggests, like the analysis from the point of view of queer theory cited above, that the predominance of identification or desire in any
relationship, or phase of a relationship, cannot be predicted by the gender, or even the sexuality, of subject or object. As Fuss asks, since “psychoanalysis’s basic distinction between wanting to be the other and wanting to have the other is a precarious one at best, its epistemological validity seriously open to question. . . . Why assume . . . that any subject’s sexuality is structured in terms of pairs?” (11). My own emphasis in this study reverses these terms: Why assume that any pair is structured in terms of its subjects’ sexuality? That is, in the readings of self/other relationships that follow, I do not take the “wish to be a subject” that binds these pairs as primarily a wish about object choice. I read desire largely in terms of identification: as desire to be, rather than to have, a particular kind of subject—sometimes, but not always, including a particular kind of sexual subject.

Further challenges to conventional psychoanalytic accounts of the vectors and consequences of identification for sexuality and gender identity have come from theorists, such as José Muñoz, in Disidentifications, Heather Love, in Feeling Backward, and Kathryn Bond Stockton, in Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame, who draw on recent interest in negative affects such as shame, loss, and disidentification to challenge not the classic division between identification and desire but another slippery Freudian division, between progressive or formative instances of identification and those (often associated with narcissism or melancholia) that are apparently regressive or disintegrative. Love, for example, suggests that queer theory’s “relation to the queer past is suffused not only by feelings of regret, despair, and loss but also by the shame of identification” with those negative feelings; in response “queer critics and historians have . . . disavowed the difficulties of the queer past, arguing that our true history has not been written” (32). By contrast, she suggests the necessity of allowing scope to “negative or ambivalent identifications with the [queer] past [that] can serve to disrupt the present” (45). Muñoz addresses the question of how subjects with racially as well as sexually minoritized identities—queers of color—experience “disidentification” as a response that does not simply disavow “ruined or spoiled” identities or desires but rather that “negotiates strategies of resistance within the flux of discourse and power” (19), particularly through performance art that reworks the representation of both ideal and stigmatized objects of identification.

Important redirections and rethinkings of Freudian schemata in the context of race studies and postcolonial studies have also come from outside queer theory, from seminal works such as Frantz Fanon’s Black
Skin, White Masks to more recent analyses such as Paul Gilroy’s Post-colonial Melancholia and Anne Anlin Cheng’s The Melancholy of Race. Like Fanon, Cheng insists on the inseparability of a psychic mechanism of identification from the social context that makes possible or forecloses identifications, asking “What are the ontological conditions under which ‘identify’ can take place? . . . How do we separate ontic and familial ‘selves’ (an assumption and a preoccupation inherited from psychoanalysis) from the subject positions invented by society, culture, and politics? . . . Social forms of compulsion and oppression may have their hold precisely because they mime or invoke ontic modes of identification” (27). Such challenges to the distinctions between the psychic and the social are visible in the representations in novels of formation of protagonists in situations of racial or national oppression and conflict, as in Jamaica Kincaid’s Lucy and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s Nervous Conditions and The Book of Not.

DEFENDING LITERARY IDENTIFICATION

Suspicion of reading and readers associated with identification did not disappear in the twentieth century, or with the rise of psychoanalytic models. With the emergence of Modernism and an avant-garde aesthetic in the first decades of the twentieth century, the narrative and reading practices associated with Victorian and Edwardian realist fiction, including their encouragement of readerly identification, began to be viewed as old-fashioned and were associated with a numerically impressive but culturally less prestigious readership that came to be defined, derogatorily, as “middlebrow.” As Kate Flint points out, the view of women readers as psychosocially inclined toward identificatory reading continues to influence twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers and critics (31–37); women readers and women’s fiction are middlebrow unless proven otherwise. The susceptibility of a text to literary identification often functions as a mark of middlebrow or feminized status. As Suzanne Keen writes in a discussion of Oprah Winfrey’s Book Club, which propels book sales by “grant[ing] middlebrow status to works that would otherwise seem either too difficult or beneath notice,” writers, particularly male writers, who aspire to definitively literary stature may have mixed feelings about such aid: “For a [Don] DeLillo manqué, increased readership does not necessarily compensate for the association with the topicality and emotional invitation that Oprah books promise their empathetic readership” (104).
At the same time, as the reading public appears to decline, cultural anxieties about the consumption of text now most frequently attach to the growth of digital and visual media and the loss of traditional reading practices. As Keen points out, “bold claims have been made for the positive consequences of novel reading, and these contentions grow more urgent as the practice of literary reading in Anglo-American culture undergoes startling declines” (xv). Some scholars and critics in a variety of fields—Keen instances the philosopher Martha Nussbaum, the historian Lynn Hunt, and the evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker—have revived assertions that, through readers’ sympathetic identification with characters, “novel reading cultivates empathy that produces good citizens for the world” (xv) and thus achieves desirable social ends. This humanist defense of literature as culturally valuable implicitly equates fiction with realist fictions, which classically invites responses of identification and sympathy. It also explicitly equates reading with moral pedagogy.

The implicit or explicit celebration of literary identification is open to empirical, aesthetic, and political objections. From an empirical point of view, as Keen points out, “Whether novels on their own can actually extend readers’ empathetic imagination and make prosocial action more likely remains uncertain” (116). From an aesthetic point of view, an advocacy of literature based primarily on assumptions about its moral function and effect can seem to devalue or at least misrecognize the creative enterprise. Such advocacy makes no claims for, and indeed may be incompatible with, rhetorical and narrative modes that do not invite identification. It may be hostile to any textual practices whose aims are not primarily realist, ethical, or socially oriented, and to postmodernist fictions that break with both nineteenth-century realism and Modernist experimentalism—metafictive or metaphysical modes (such as can be found in the work of Paul Auster); parodic or ironic modes (such as can be found the work of Kathy Acker or Jasper Fforde); magical realist modes (as in, for example, novels by Angela Carter or Salman Rushdie); and the anomic or confrontational vision of authors such as Denis Cooper or Rebecca Brown.

From the point of view of political critique, the strong pedagogical and ethical claims made on behalf of fictional realism—based partly on its imputed ability to create sympathy for real others on the model of the identifications it encourages with fictional ones—are equally open to question. If identification takes a “detour through the other,” as Fuss says, its final destination is always the self. This autocentrism is all the more pronounced in identification with literary characters (rather than real per-
sons), since in some sense their attributes, to which the reader responds, can only be those that the reader has already lent, and since (as Catherine Gallagher points out) literary characters cannot, unlike actual other persons, evade, resist, or pose counter-claims to our assimilations of them. Many political objections can be raised against the supposed ethical value of literary identification: it may be seen to encourage subjective, emotional responses to situations that would be better served by activism; to serve as a medium for the reproduction of bourgeois subjectivity; and to indulge readers in solipsistic fantasies of sympathy and solidarity that do nothing to improve their responsiveness to real others, and in particular do nothing to engender social or political change. Such reservations echo the concerns of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers about the possibly self-indulgent and fantastical nature of emotional response to fictional others. But where those concerns were broadly ethical in nature and often allied to conservative social views (for example about the intellectual capacities of women or working-class subjects), these contemporary critiques are generally politically progressive, shaped by almost a century of Marxist and post-Marxist aesthetics that is generally wary of the immersive effects of aesthetic representation. Bertolt Brecht, for example, found both nineteenth-century fictional realism and traditional naturalistic drama equally illusionistic and reactionary in their aesthetics of character identification. According to Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, Brecht’s theory of identification demonstrates how “the ideological effects of literature . . . materialise via an identification process between the reader or the audience and the hero or anti-hero, the simultaneous constitution of the fictive ‘consciousness’ of the character with the ideological ‘consciousness’ of the reader” (90). In this ideological functioning, literary identification becomes an instance, in the aesthetic field, of what Louis Althusser defines as “interpellation”: a “hailing” of the subject by ideology, which “has the function (which defines it) of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects” (171). Althusser does not address literature in this essay; it is not a “state apparatus” at the level of his other examples, which include the state educational system and the Church. Balibar and Macherey’s “On Literature as an Ideological Form,” however, explicitly attempts to extend his conception of ideology as a system of social practices to the function of literature in interpellating subjects: There is [in literary texts] only ever identification of one subject with another (potentially with “oneself”: “Madame Bovary, c’est moi,”
familiar example, signed Gustave Flaubert). . . . Through the endless functioning of its texts, literature unceasingly “produces” subjects, on display for everyone. . . . Literature endlessly transforms (concrete) individuals into subjects and endows them with a quasi-real hallucinatory individuality. (93)

Balibar and Macherey conclude that “class struggle is not abolished in the literary text and the literary effects which it produces. They bring about the reproduction, as dominant, of the ideology of the dominant class” (93), through the identification-effect among other effects.

For Marxist and post-Marxist critics, nineteenth-century realist fiction is a locus classicus for the at best ambiguous, and at worst reactionary, tendencies of literary identification in relation to social change. Raymond Williams finds, in Victorian authors attempting to depict working-class experience, such as Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and George Gissing, that a “negative identification”—an “imaginative recoil” (90) from the potential disaffection, violence, and cultural difference of working-class protagonist with whom, up to a point, these authors also experience “imaginative identification” (88)—ultimately vitiates the representation and resolution of class struggle. “When she touches . . . the lives and the problems of working people,” Williams observes of Eliot, “her personal observation and conclusion surrender, virtually without a fight, to the general structure of feeling which was the common property of her generation” (109): Eliot’s authorial identification with a protagonist cannot overcome her class identification with her own class interests and “structure of feeling.”21 In Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction, Audrey Jaffe returns to a similar contretemps. She argues that because sympathy and identification in many Victorian novels depend on a previous recognition of similarity, the novels function ideologically not to bridge but to exclude and minimize experiences of difference. In a discussion of Daniel Deronda, Jaffe argues that because Daniel first sympathizes with Jews and subsequently discovers that he is a Jew, “what is represented [by Eliot] as sympathy with the other turns out to be sympathy with the self” (133); thus “rather than promoting sympathy as a means toward understanding difference, then—indeed, strikingly rejecting that principle in Deronda’s rejection of Gwendolen—the novel valorizes sympathy as an identification with and affirmation of similarity” (141). These repeated discoveries of the self-same in an apparent other, Jaffe argues, sharply undercut the proffer of disinterested tolerance, if not sympathy, that the novels, in a liberal humanist mode, understand themselves
to be making. Regenia Gagnier suggests that such obliterating responses similarly characterize the present-day readers of Victorian novels of proletarian experience such as those by Hardy and Gissing: “Middle-class students today . . . want to ‘identify’ with characters, and the only characters they can identify with are those with subjectivities (introspective, self-conscious, self-interested subjectivities) like their own. . . . If literature does not give ‘us’—the status quo—ourselves, we do not identify with it and it is not canonical” (136). In other words, according to Gagnier, literary identification leads not to Eliot’s hoped-for “extension” of sympathies but rather to their sclerosis and to a reproduction, through canon-formation, of dominant ideologies.

Yet if literary identification can function to interpellate bourgeois subjects, reproduce the status quo, and negate rather than address social difference, those effects do not foreclose more radical or liberatory possibilities. The response of a reader to the text’s invitation to identification is not predictable or predetermined, even in these cases. Jaffe persuasively demonstrates that the moral argument of Daniel Deronda about Judaism depends on a construction of similitude that eliminates rather than tolerates the possibility of ethnic difference within national borders. But one might respond that the novel and its title character have hardly commanded much enthusiasm, let alone identification, from readers then or now—“Daniel Deronda, c’est moi” is not a common response. F. R. Leavis captures a widespread impatience when he famously advocates eliminating Deronda altogether. Indeed, the novel’s division of attention among Daniel, Gwendolyn, and even Mira Lapidoth, along with its other rhetorical features (such as its swatches of historical and ethnographic exposition), militate against readerly identification with a single character.22 As for the canonicity of Hardy and Gissing: although Hardy may have ended his life as a literary lion, the Victorian response to his political provocations was not uniformly welcoming; and Gissing has fared better in contemporary editions and on syllabi, than, say, George Meredith, a less politically provocative writer. What I mean to emphasize here is that readers are not so reliably swept away by the rhetoric or affect of identification as to render them incapable of discrimination both in individual reading practices and over the history of reception. The pleasure in literary identification is not necessarily opposed to a capacity for analysis; it is not a swoon of the intellect but a changeable response, one that may be withheld, modified, reflected on; a detour, not a determination.

Further, readerly identification beyond the individual character—with authors and the act of authorship—may indicate prospects of thought and
action not embodied within, and even counter to, a novel’s diegesis. *Jane Eyre*, for example, is a novel whose trajectory of identification appears to be tightly controlled by the intensity of its first-person point of view, which makes it difficult, in Gayatri Spivak’s resonant phrase, to “wrench oneself away from the mesmerizing focus of the ‘subject-constitution’ of the female individualist” (897). But even *Jane Eyre* offers more opportunities for distance and reflection than might first appear. For example, the eleventh chapter of Brontë’s novel draws attention to the artifice of scene construction, as it metaleptically conflates the locations of author, reader, and character: “A new chapter in a novel is like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn at Millcote. . . . All this is visible to you by the light of an oil-lamp hanging from the ceiling, and by that of an excellent fire, near which I sit in my cloak and bonnet; . . . I am warming away the numbness and chill contracted by sixteen hours’ exposure to the rawness of an October day” (*Jane Eyre* 96). The ontological status of the pronoun “I,” this novel’s usual location of identification, shifts radically over these sentences. In the first sentence it must belong to someone we would call an author, Charlotte Brontë (or Currer Bell), who has written “a new chapter in a novel,” and addresses an authorial reader. Subsequently, however, the “I” clearly belongs to the autodiegetic narrator, “Jane Eyre,” who is, as that reader has just been reminded, a character in the novel. This “I” might be imagined as addressing a narrative reader, one for whom “the George Inn at Millcote” is a real location, and Jane a real speaker—but it would make no sense for such a Jane to locate herself or her address within “a new chapter in a novel.” On the one hand, Brontë redoubles the imaginary nature of the scene through a simile that compares the novel to a theatrical performance. On the other, she asserts the equally material embodiment of all the parties to this readerly transaction—the author “draw[s] up the curtain,” which requires a physical effort; the reader “views” the scene not metaphorically, in her mind’s eye, but with the sense of sight, “by the light of an oil-lamp . . . and by that of an excellent fire”; and the character feels “warm[th]” succeeding “numbness and chill,” through the sense of touch.

Such coexistence among author, reader, and character ought to register as paradoxical if not impossible, yet this moment is much less disruptive of realist illusion to read than it is to describe. Garrett Stewart describes this potentially paradoxical relationship of “the twin pulls on the subject reader of classic fiction. These are, on the one hand, the draw of a credible world and, on the other, the lure of assured readerly status with respect to that world. . . . Only the mutually compelling appeal . . . could
keep in suspension their fields of force” (5). Brontë’s scene illustrates the simultaneous appeal of, and appeal to, both these “fields of force”—Jane’s “world” is credibly sensuous, but Brontë’s direct invocation of a narrative reader reminds the authorial reader of her status as reader. Brontë’s and Jane’s casual acknowledgment that she is a fictional construct seems to increase, rather than to interrupt, an authorial reader’s intimacy with both figures. At the same time, it also reinforces that reader’s autonomy in relation to Jane; our identification is partly chosen and willed, and thus remains under our control.

In all of these ways, literary identification not only offers readers the “mesmerizing” experience of “subject-constitution” but also draws attention to the limits and complexities of that autonomy. Which of these reading experiences predominates will be different for differently situated readers and even for individual readers at different times. In other words, to speak of a reader “identifying” with a character does not exhaust the possibility for different affects in and effects of this identification. As one of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s memorable “axioms” reminds us, “To identify as must always include multiple processes of identification with. It also involves identifying as against; but even did it not, the relations implicit in identifying with are, as psychoanalysis suggests, in themselves quite sufficiently fraught with intensities of incorporation, diminishment, inflation, threat, loss, reparation, and disavowal” (Epistemology 61). These “multiple processes” and “intensities” may offer different points of entry particularly to readers otherwise marginalized by a text or the cultural construction it represents. (Otherwise, there could have been no Wide Sargasso Sea.) In Disidentifications, Muñoz draws on Michel Pêcheux’s elaboration of Althusser to theorize an aesthetics of “disidentification” within the aesthetic of performance by queers of color:

[In Pêcheux’s schema] the first mode is understood as “identification,” where a “Good Subject” chooses the path of identification with discursive and ideological forms. “Bad Subjects” resist and attempt to reject the images and identificatory sites offered by dominant ideology and proceed to rebel, to “counteridentify” and turn against this symbolic system. . . . Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. . . . [T]his ‘working on and against’ is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at
the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance. (12)

Muñoz’s analysis focuses specifically on twentieth-century (post-Stonewall) visual and performance arts, often in a consciously political or activist context. Announced or explicit performances of such “disidentification” are less frequent in the novels of formation that I analyze, even those written by queer authors and authors of color, but the ways in which such writers use the inherited structure of the novel of formation to represent non-dominant forms of subjectivity can themselves be seen as “working on and against” writerly strategies. The range and variability of responses to, and within, identification suggested by Sedgwick, Pêcheux, and Muñoz will, I hope, be visible in the literary identifications I describe—a range and variability that allow such identifications to function in liberatory or life-enhancing ways as well as (I do not say “rather than”) oppressive or conservative ones.

Finally, a representation of fictions of identification as appealing to readers only, or even primarily, on the basis of an a priori similarity seems to me incomplete. As described above, identification is not only assimilative but projective, involves not only recognition (“She’s like me!”) but also aspiration (“I could be like her!”) and fear (“I could be like her!”); it requires not just familiarity but also a measure of otherness, a space of difference across which identification can take—or fail in—its synaptic leap. To varying degrees, and in different contexts, identification in all of the novels considered here involves these forms of negotiation and balance. Not only may the reader be invited to identify with characters whose spatial or historical location or subject positions she or he does not share, but also the narratives themselves often represent identification as difficult, partial, or occurring across difference.

Susan Bernstein distinguishes between “promiscuous identification” with a sympathetic protagonist (such as, in her example, Anne Frank), which involves an “unreflective assimilation of the read subject into an untroubled unitary reading self” (146) and “dissonant identification,” which “captures the value of affective engagement as a strategy for approaching, for self-consciously apprehending, traumatic knowledge” (158–59). Certainly in the novels I discuss, literary identification is never simply mimetic and is often “dissonant”; it hinges on and points to what Sharon Marcus, also discussing Anne Frank, calls the “difference” that is “identification’s ongoing condition” (105). And to the extent that these novels implicitly or explicitly represent their authors’ own identifications
with previous novels of formation and take those narratives in new directions, they exemplify the ways in which literary identification may produce innovation as often as recursion. Yet here I must register a final caveat. Bernstein’s distinction revalues literary identification by disavowing its pleasurable or indulgent aspects, assigning them to the false consciousness of some other, bad identifying readers or reading practices and approving in their place a metacritical reading strategy (“self-consciously apprehending”). In other words, her defense of literary identification functions by reviving an attribution of moral efficacy to (particular kinds) of reading. (Even her use of the word “promiscuous” recalls the moralistic Victorian association between affective reading and sexual transgression.) In basing my own defense of literary identification in part on demonstrations of its complexity, productivity, and potential multiplicity, I also do not entirely escape the temptation to represent this practice as valuable by moral association (since our culture generally ascribes value, both aesthetic and ethical, to complexity), but in the chapters that follow, I have tried to avoid suggesting that literary identification necessarily makes readers morally better or politically freer, or that its pleasures and comforts can only be justified by such a claim. My goal is less to justify or to arraign than to account for the continued appeal of a genre and reading practice.
INTRODUCTION

1. For contemporary conceptions of the Bildungsroman, see Moretti ch. 1; and Fraiman ch. 1. For a recent discussion of the origins of the term “Bildungsroman” that emphasizes its historical association with cosmopolitanism and modernity, see Boes. On the Bildungsroman in the European context, see, in addition to Hirsch, Bakhtin ch. 4; and Moretti. For a recent critique of the Bildungsroman tradition in a global framework, see Slaughter, particularly ch. 2.

2. For the Bildungsroman as a genre of women’s literature, see, e.g., Abel, Hirsch, and Langland; and Fuderer for a bibliography through 1990. For a reevaluation of distinctions between male and female Bildungsromane, see L. Ellis, particularly ch. 1.

3. Two prominent nineteenth-century examples of novels of formation with male protagonists—Dickens’s David Copperfield (1849–50) and Great Expectations (1860–61)—are exceptions that paradoxically support such a claim: the protagonists of these two novels are, if not consistently feminized, at least frequently placed in feminized positions. Dickens’s narrative voice always assumes a mixed (male and female) audience, and there is little in David or Pip’s psychological trajectories of susceptibility to manipulation, social anxiety, and hopeless love that would debar identification from a conventionally feminine point of view.

4. The boundary between novels of courtship and novels of formation, particularly early in the nineteenth century, is not rigid, and Pride and Prejudice is, in fact, often discussed as an example of the female Bildungsroman, perhaps because of the relative many-sidedness with which Elizabeth Bennett and her relationships are represented, compared to a courtship heroine such as Pamela or Frances Burney’s Evelina. Susan Fraiman, for example, takes the novel as presenting the suppression or undoing of development: Elizabeth Bennett’s apparent progress toward a triumphant romantic ending is shadowed by “a darker, downward vector: the narrative that passes Elizabeth from one father to another and, in doing so, takes her from shaping judgments to being shaped by
them” (63). I am not entirely persuaded, however, that Fraiman’s examples of Elizabeth’s “humiliation” at the hands of patriarchy outweigh the impression left by Elizabeth’s ability to compel Darcy to propose not once but twice; to continue her “lively, sportive manner of talking” to him (Austen 297) until almost the novel’s last page; and to feel quite undiluted “delight” in attaining at last “all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley” (294). In other words, it seems to me to make as much sense to read *Pride and Prejudice* as a positive exemplar of the category of the novel of courtship as to read it as a negative example of the novel of formation.

5. James acknowledges the precedence of Shakespeare and of George Eliot but insists that their heroines are “typical, none the less, of a class difficult, in the individual case, to make a centre of interest” and that the “slimmesses” of their heroines are “never suffered to be sole ministers of [the work’s] appeal, but have their inadequacy eked out with comic relief and underplot, as the playwrights say, when not with murders and battles and the great mutations of the world” (11).

6. Identification has been more systematically theorized as a viewer experience within psychoanalytic film theory, especially in the work of feminist film theorists such as Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane, and Kaja Silverman. Such work recognizes and builds on the spectacular immediacy of the experience of visual identification as well as the centrality of the visual in Freudian and Lacanian scenes of identification—the child’s vision of the parents’ genitals as representing what it has or lacks or of its own autonomy figured in the mirror. As I have already suggested above, however, identification is the subject and mainspring of verbal as well as visual narrative (including verbal narratives of visual scenes).

7. For the “mock reader,” see Gibson; for the “narratee” see Prince; for the “implied reader,” see Iser 27–38.

8. According to Ross Chambers, reading is “transactional” in the sense that it is produced by a relationship of exchange between reader and narrative: “in that it mediates *exchanges* that produce historical change, it is transactional, too, in that this functioning is in itself dependent on an initial *contract*, an understanding between the participants in the exchange as to the purposes served by the narrative function” (8). On the basis of this transaction, narrative is not hermetic but “has the power to change human situations” (7), and its study cannot only be formal or structural but “must open eventually onto ideological and cultural analysis of these enabling agreements” (9)—an obligation to which narratological theorists have increasingly acceded since these words were written in the early 1980s.

9. See also Schweickart: “Does the text control the reader, or vice versa? For David Bleich, Norman Holland, and Stanley Fish, the reader holds controlling interest. Readers read the poems they have made. . . . At the other pole are Michael Riffaterre, Georges Poulet, and Wolfgang Iser, who acknowledge the creative role of the reader, but ultimately take the text to be the dominant force. To read, from this point of view, is to create the text according to its own promptings” (36).

10. The passage of time, of course (perhaps this is what Rabinowitz means by “historical situation”), also separates audience members from each other and from the author’s ability to have a “firm knowledge of the actual readers who will pick up his or her book.” Rabinowitz later discusses temporal “problem[s] of recovery” (33–34).

11. Spivak writes of *Frankenstein*: “Within the allegory of our reading, the place of both the English lady [i.e., Margaret Saville, the narrative’s internal addressee] and the unnamable monster are left open by this great flawed text. It is satisfying for a postcolonial reader to consider this a noble resolution for a nineteenth-century novel” (909).
Comparison between two iterations of a narrative may also, of course, privilege chronological priority, the original over the adaptation. See J. Sanders 32–41 for a discussion of adaptation, originality, and plagiarism in contemporary literature.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Many readers—most of them women, many of them writers—have written about their attachment to *Little Women* and particularly to Jo March. See, e.g., the essays in Alberghene and Clark. See also Sicherman 246–47, 256–64.

2. “Cathexis” refers to “the fact that a certain amount of psychical energy is attached to an idea or to a group of ideas, to a part of the body, to an object, etc.” (LaPlanche and Pontalis 62). Schwartz’s “psychical energy” is directed here both to the ideas for which *Little Women* stands (authorship) and to the object that embodies them (the book itself).

3. For a reading of a “pedagogic erotics” based on identification within *Little Women*, see Kent 43–59.

4. On eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women readers, see also Badia and Phegley.

5. See Heller 94–114 for a discussion of Hazlitt’s emphasis on imagination, particularly imaginative identification with fictional and dramatic characters; and 43–45 for a discussion of Coleridge’s view of the pedagogical value of imaginative literature and literary identification.

6. On connections between sympathy and melodramatic spectacle in nineteenth-century literature, see Jaffe. See Warhol for a recent analysis and defense of affective reading and film-viewing in the sentimental and melodramatic tradition.

7. For a complex analysis of the “countermovement of desire within Eliot’s central characters that can be seen to divert them from any orientation to others at all, and to turn them irrevocably inward instead” (117)—that is, partly, the difficulty for those characters of achieving and maintaining sympathy—see Kucich ch. 2.

8. Ablow has a different reading of the ethical situation brought about by the pain of identification that accompanies sympathy, for both characters and readers, in *The Mill on the Floss*. She suggests that “Maggie’s understanding [of Lucy’s and Philip’s pain] is made wholly unselfish by her consciousness of having caused it. This consequence is almost unbearably painful. Yet it is also deeply ethical” (88); similarly, Eliot’s “willingness to accept responsibility for Maggie’s fate constitutes the ethically valuable position, binding the novelist to both the character and the reader by bonds of remorse” (3).

9. The early twentieth century also saw the popularization in English aesthetics, through the writing of Vernon Lee, of the term “empathy,” from the German “Einfühlung,” to describe a reader’s or viewer’s affective investment in a work of art. Currently, “empathy” is a term used in a variety of contexts in philosophy and psychology; for an account of its uses, see Keen ch. 1.

10. On Freud’s emphasis on oral incorporation and cannibalism as an expression of and figure for certain primary identifications, and later in Lacan, see Barzilai 115–21.

11. See Mitchell pt. 1 for a discussion of the distinction between drive-related and relational origins.

12. Brooks argues for the importance of “Freud’s progressive discovery of the transference, which brings into play the dynamic interaction of the teller and listener of and to stories, the dialogic relation of narrative production and interpretation.” This consider-
ation, Brooks suggests, “should . . . help us complicate, and refine, versions of narrative analysis that do not take account of the relations of tellers and listeners” (50). While transference, and the figure of the analyst, fall outside the scope of my reading, I share Brooks’s emphasis on the “dialogic relation of narrative production and interpretation.”

13. On Freud’s disavowal of literary technique, see Fuss 4–5; and Jacobus 197–204.

14. Often Freud resolves such circularities by assigning their elements to hierarchical locations within a developmental narrative, so that, for example, a confusion between identification and object-choice is “primitive”: “At the very beginning, in the individual’s primitive oral phase, object-cathexis and identification are no doubt indistinguishable from each other” (EI 23). See Butler for an argument that the “dispositions” are effects of an unacknowledged prior social prohibition on homosexual desire (Gender Trouble 57–65).

15. For discussions, with differing emphases, of the ideologically normalizing tendency and logical instability of the classical opposition between identification and desire, see (in addition to Fuss, cited above) Butler, Gender Trouble 35–78 and Bodies 93–119 and 239–40; Sedgwick, Tendencies 73–103; Kent 7–15 and passim. See Sinfield for a taxonomy of the possible combinations produced by keeping in place the binarisms of male/female, gay/straight, and identification/desire while freeing them from any necessary relation to each other.

16. See Woolf, Death of the Moth 176–86. For a discussion of how Woolf herself is represented within the middlebrow “Great Books” culture of the mid-twentieth-century United States, see Silver 68–78.

17. Brantlinger locates the beginning of this cultural conflict between visual and written narrative earlier, in the first couple of decades of the twentieth century, when “the cinema . . . was just coming into its own. Cultural critics of various ideological persuasions lined up to prophesy that this new technology of entertainment . . . would mean the death of reading, of literacy, and of the wholesome book-culture of the past. The activity of novel-reading, which to many diagnosticians of cultural disease had seemed so dangerous to the mental health of the reading public from the 1700s down to [Virginia Woolf’s famous date] ‘December, 1910,’ and sometimes beyond, now seemed benign and even healthful to those who looked upon movies as toxic. Exactly the same arguments would be repeated, of course, about television” (209–10).

18. Keen reviews contemporary psychological and neuroscientific research on empathy in ch. 1, and the limited empirical studies of empathy toward others as a result of reading in ch. 3.

19. This suspicion of the ideological functioning of identification is often part of a more general suspicion of the ideological function of fictional realism. In this analysis, in Harry Shaw’s summary, “realist representation is said to be naively transparent and malignantly totalistic. . . . The realist attempt to represent the complexities of a given historical moment turns out to be simply an attempt to ‘naturalize’ that moment, to make its working seem part of nature, not culture, to deny that it is a product of contingent historical forces” (9; emphasis in original). Readerly identification with fictional characters, ratifying the representation and “reality” of their experience, enhances the “natural[ized]” representation and thus the denial of historical agency.

20. On Brecht’s dramatic theory and his opposition to Lukács, see Eagleton 63–72. For examples of the mistrust of identification, see Brecht 91–99. Brecht is cited as the “first Marxist theorist” to focus on the “identification effect” (89) by Balibar and Macherey; for a similar analysis applying specifically to English realist fiction, see Gagnier, 163–73, also discussed below.
21. Williams’s readings of the way this “negative identification” plays out for Victorian authors are nevertheless more sympathetic than condemning. See ch. 5, on industrial novels, and 175–79 on Gissing.

22. For the mixed nineteenth-century responses to Daniel Deronda, see Carroll 360–447.

CHAPTER TWO

1. See Barzilai ch. 2 for an overview of the argument of this essay.

2. The novel’s displacement of moral significance was evident, and distressing, to many Victorian reviewers. “What does it all come to except that human life is inexplicable, and that women who feel this find the feeling painful?” wonders the Saturday Review’s reviewer uncomfortably (Carroll 117); Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton finds that “this remarkable writer does not enough weigh what is Agreeable or Disagreeable” (Carroll 121); and the popular novelist Dinah Mulock Craik asks “What good [the novel] will do?—whether it will lighten any burdened heart, help any perplexed spirit, comfort the sorrowful, succour the tempted, or help bring back the erring into the way of peace . . . ?” (Carroll 156).

3. For an exhaustive account of Eliot’s allusions to Corinne, see Moers ch. 9. For a reading of Corinne as “a feminist text engaged with issues of subjectivity as process” see Miller 165; for a reading of Corinne as “openly celebrat[ing] the value of European book culture,” see Peterson 80. Peterson also analyzes representations of the “reader protagonist” (3) in some nineteenth-century English and French novels, including The Mill on the Floss and Jane Eyre. For her discussion of reading as a “process of identification [which] constitutes a fantasy process in which readers shape, change, and adapt the text, sometimes even rewrite it, until it can meet and deal with their wishes and fears so that their fantasies may ultimately be gratified,” in both real-life readers and reader-protagonists, see 29–36.

4. For a reading of The Mill on the Floss as more straightforwardly a revenge fantasy on Maggie’s behalf, see Moers 266–67.

5. Peterson notes that in her childhood reading of illustrated religious books such as The History of the Devil, “Maggie’s tendency is to split herself in two and to identify with each of the main characters in the picture” (190).

6. For a discussion of the brother–sister relationship as a template for nineteenth-century representations of heterosexual relations, see V. Sanders, particularly 101–3 for The Mill on the Floss.

7. On their first occasion alone, Maggie takes Stephen’s arm, as the narrator suggests that “there is something strangely winning to most women in that offer of a firm arm” (408). Later, the “winning” effect will be reversed, as a reverie on “the beauty of a woman’s arm” (441) ends with Stephen “dart[ing] towards [Maggie’s] arm, and shower[ing] kisses on it” (442). For discussions of the erotic significance of the arm in the novel, see Homans, “Maggie’s Arm,” particularly 175–77; and Ramel.

8. The full coincidence of novelistic with romantic closure in the nineteenth-century novel—a completely achieved “marriage plot”—is surprisingly rare in the nineteenth-century novel, and its incidence diminishes as the century advances. The subdued projected union of Lucy and Stephen in The Mill on the Floss anticipates, for example, the completely disenchanted return of Grace Melbury to her unfaithful husband, Fitzpiers, some thirty years later, at the end of Hardy’s novel The Woodlanders (1887). In a more
comic mode of deflation, Margaret Oliphant’s *Phoebe, Junior* (1876) concludes with its heroine rejecting the interesting suitor to whom she is romantically attracted in favor of a dull but respectable young man through whom she will be able to fulfill her political, rather than romantic, ambitions.

9. In addition to Maggie and Lucy and Romola and Tessa, variations of this pattern occur with Dinah Morris and Hetty Sorel in *Adam Bede* (1859); and with Dorothea Brooke and Rosamund Vincy in *Middlemarch* (1871–72). In *Adam Bede*, Dinah’s renunciations (first of worldly ambition in her preaching, then of spiritual ambition when her sect bans women preachers) enable her to take over the elements of the marriage plot—Adam’s love and a reproductive future—from Hetty, whose selfish desires bring her exile and death. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea and Rosamond both survive and marry, but Dorothea’s renunciations (of her inheritance from Casaubon and of her intellectual ambitions) earn her romantic love and authorial approval, while Rosamond becomes Lydgate’s vampiric “basil plant” (680). Further, Eliot maintains a difference of physical, reflective of moral, scale between the monumentalized protagonist and her infantilized counterpart: Dinah “appears above the middle height for a woman” and is first presented preaching, whereas Hetty, churning butter, has “a beauty like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, or babies just beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief” (*Adam Bede* 83); similarly, Romola is Titianesque beauty, with hair “of a reddish gold colour, enriched by an unbroken small ripple, such as may be seen in the sunset clouds on grandest autumnal evenings” (*Romola* 93), first seen engaged in reading to her father, while Tessa is introduced with emphasis on her “blue baby-eyes” and “baby face” as she offers milk and bread to Tito Melema (68, 69).

10. Showalter writes, in 1980, “In the 1970s, Eliot became the most difficult and controversial figure for feminist literary criticism, the focus of a troubled anger that testifies to her lively and enduring reputation and to the cycles of projection and rejection that have been part of her critical history” (299). See also Ablow 71n7 for references to feminist critical responses to Eliot.

11. McLaughlin offers a straightforwardly biographical reading of the novel; Homans (*Bearing the Word* ch. 6) analyzes, from a psychoanalytic point of view, the connections among Eliot’s representations of the brother-sister relationship in *The Mill on the Floss* and the “Brother and Sister” sonnet sequence, Eliot’s reading of Wordsworth, and her own sense of literary authority; Carlisle, “Autobiography as Discourse,” argues that “the further the novel moves from the facts of Eliot’s life, the more genuinely it becomes autobiography” (179); and Peterson suggests that while “autobiographical in spirit” (182), *The Mill on the Floss* also draws inspiration in plot and character from the writing of George Sand.

12. For a discussion of Beauvoir’s ambivalence, if not naiveté, on the question of representation, see Angelfors 66.

13. For the sake of clarity and to avoid collapsing the represented with the writing subject, I will refer to the author and the first-person narrator of *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* as “Beauvoir,” and her protagonist, the younger self whose story she tells, as “Simone.”

14. On Beauvoir’s identification with Eliot, see also Showalter 299–302. For an argument that Beauvoir’s adult commitment to Existentialism retrospectively shapes her representation of her childhood, see Moi 26–30.

15. Beauvoir uses pseudonyms for some characters in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. Zaza’s family name, given by Beauvoir as “Mabille,” is Lacoin.
16. On Beauvoir’s repeated attempts to tell Zaza’s story, see Angelfors 64–66 and Beauvoir, *Prime of Life* 121–23 and 269.

17. In fact Simone has several earlier, briefer introductions to the dark girl/blond rival plot, first when as a child she sees a film, *Le Roi de Camargue* (1921; dir. André Hugon), in which the hero is engaged to “a sweet blonde heroine, a simple peasant girl” whom he deserts for a “lovely dark gipsy” (*MDD* 53, 54), and later when, reading *Little Women*, she discovers “the news of Laurie’s marriage to Jo’s young sister, Amy, who was blonde, vain, and stupid. . . . The man I loved and by whom I thought I was loved had betrayed me for a little goose of a girl” (104–5).

18. On the complex ways in which this reference “act[s] as a break upon the engine of heterosexual romance” see Cohen 157–58.

19. On George Eliot’s trajectory from anonymity to revelation of her identity to the creation of “George Eliot,” see Bodenheimer ch. 5.

20. For an overview and discussion of Beauvoir’s representations of lesbianism, see Simons. Melanie Hawthorne places Beauvoir’s own same-sex attachments in the context of her pedagogical persona (*Contingent Loves* 55–83). For Beauvoir’s own representations, see *Letters to Sartre*; for her categorical denial of engaging in lesbian relationships, see Schwarzer 112.

21. A. Hughes argues that Sartre replaces Zaza as “a partner in a mirror-relationship” who takes on the status of the phallic mother (129).

22. In Beauvoir’s French, Zaza does not “seem” to gaze reproachfully at Simone, but simply does so: “elle me regardait avec reproche [she was looking at me reproachfully]” (503; my translation).

23. Beauvoir “published essays, organized and directed the Comité pour Djamila Boukpacha, and was the co-author, with Halimi, of a book that sought to expose the young woman’s torture while condemning the general brutalities of the colonial situation” (Caputi 120). See also Beauvoir and Halimi, introduction and app. A.

24. For a less sympathetic discussion of Beauvoir’s relationship to a national and racial other, see Staedtler-Djédji, who concludes that “the descriptions of Simone de Beauvoir in *La Force des Choses* I reflect a certain resentment in the face of the reality of Africa, but also a total absence of intercultural communication” (215; my translation).

25. On the publication travails and history of *Nervous Conditions*, see Zwicker 3–8.

26. See S. Gallagher and Willey and Treiber for discussions of the novel’s rapid absorption into pedagogical canons in the United States. For examples of criticism that combines feminist and postcolonialist emphases, see, e.g., Zwicker, Andrade, Willey, and Androne, all in Willey and Treiber; see also Young, ch. 4. See Mule; and Andrade for readings of *Nervous Conditions* as within the conventions of the Bildungsroman. See Pri- morac on Zimbabwean fiction and its contexts, esp. 104–17 for her reading of *Nervous Conditions*.


28. The Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau was created in 1954 for the publication of literature in two languages, Shona and Ndebele. According to Simon Gikandi in the *Encyclopedia of African Literature*, “Predominantly mission-trained potential writers
attended Literature Bureau new and aspiring writers’ workshops, where they learned the ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ of writing literature in the political context of colonialism. . . . The rules established at these workshops led to the crystallization of a literary tradition that most Zimbabwean writers have had to reckon with. In addition, the resultant literature grew under the watchful eyes of publications officers whose job was to ensure that writers did not publish politically subversive works” (Gikandi 495).

29. In The Three Golliwogs, for example, the eponymous blackface dolls are named Gollie, Wollie, and Nigger. Blyton remained mainstream well into the twentieth century. In one review of a study of Blyton, two contemporary literary scholars remember reading Blyton in Angola (then Portuguese West Africa) and Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) (Olson 294–95); another remembers receiving a copy of The Three Golliwogs as “a presentation copy from an English Sunday School for perfect attendance” (Olson 296). I read Blyton’s girls’ school series in England in the 1970s.

30. A New York Times article from 1899 on “attar of roses” recalls the days of “the grandmothers, or possibly even the great-grandmothers,” when “the slender little bottle of attar of roses flourished in all its glory,” and explains that “Bulgaria is the chief country from which comes the attar . . . while a very considerable amount is also made in Germany” (“Story of Attar of Roses” 6).

CHAPTER THREE

1. See Barzilai 81–83 for a discussion of the differences between Winnicott and Lacan in regard to the concept of mirroring.

2. For a different account of the motive and effects of Gaskell’s biography, see D’Albertis ch. 1.

3. Sharon Connor, in an essay on “loneliness” in Brontë’s letters, provides a succinct summary. In the period from 1829–1855 covered by Brontë’s published letters, “There was a particular emphasis on the problem of so called ‘excess women,’ those half a million or more extra single women ‘discovered’ by the 1851 census, who were supposedly doomed never to marry. . . . Many articles and essays in the press during this period were asking questions such as ‘What shall we do with our old maids?’ and discussing the perceived problem of middle-class women who would never be able to find a husband” (91). Connor also discusses the letter to Nussey and distinguishes between “single” and “lonely” (94–95).

4. See also Berlant and Warner for a foundational argument about the destruction of intimacy, particularly queer intimacies, under the ideology of “heterormativity,” in which “intimate life” becomes “the endlessly cited elsewhere of political public discourse, a promised haven that distracts citizens from the unequal conditions of their political and economic lives, consoles them for the damaged humanity of mass society, and shames them for any divergence between their lives and the intimate sphere that is alleged to be simple personhood” (553).

5. For an analysis of the distinction between Arnold’s and Brontë’s representations of isolation, see Gilbert and Gubar 401–2. They suggest that “While male poets like Arnold express their desire to experience an inner and more valid self, Brontë describes the pain of women who are restricted to just this private realm. Instead of seeking and celebrating the buried self, these women feel victimized by it; they long, instead, for actualization in the world” (402). See also Loeffelholz 97; and Jacobus 41.
6. On the normative direction of Shirley’s conclusion, see Bodenheimer; and Gilbert and Gubar. See Wilt for arguments for a more radical interpretation of the novel’s conclusion.

7. See, e.g., the review by G. H. Lewes of Shirley (Allott 160–70).

8. See also Ferguson, “Memory” 169 and Simmons 75 for a summary of Kincaid’s references to Jane Eyre.

9. Kincaid’s statement that “it said that it was truly an African novel” presumably refers to the novel’s blurbs, since Nervous Conditions itself, as discussed in the previous chapter, makes copious reference to Tambu’s own familiarity with English literature. Different printings of the novel sport different back and front covers and copy. One Seal Press edition (c. 1988, published 2002) has a blurb from The African Times that calls the novel “Another example of a bold new national literature . . . one which bears no mimicry of European forms and experience”; a later Seal Press edition (2004) does not include this blurb.

10. Oddly, Shockley considers Kincaid and her protagonist as “African American” subjects (see 46 and passim), although Kincaid and her protagonist are both, in fact, West Indian, raised under an English colonial regime, and come to the United States only as young adults. See Yost for another analysis of Lucy’s relationship to Villette.

11. See A Small Place (1988), Kincaid’s polemical account of the contemporary situation of Antigua, as a former colony largely dependent on a tourist economy.

12. See Viswanathan, particularly the Introduction, for an influential analysis of colonialist pedagogy as hegemonic, although one focused on India. For a discussion of the effects of colonialist pedagogy specifically on women, see Katrak ch. 3.

13. The mother-daughter relationships, and particularly the implication of the mother in the transmission of colonialist ideologies, in Kincaid’s work have been frequently discussed by critics. On this relationship in Lucy, see Bouson ch. 4; and Ferguson, Where the Land Meets the Body 123–28.

14. Dangarembga plans to continue Tambu’s narrative in a third volume; see Rooney 62.

15. On Kincaid as an angry writer, see Ferguson, Land 95–96. For examples of U.S. reviews of A Small Place that discuss Kincaid’s anger, see Kakatuni, 16; and Nicholson, “The Exile’s Bitter Return” x14.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. On the connection among closetedness, coming out, knowledge, and recognition, see Sedgwick, Epistemology 3–4 and 67–90.

2. The definitions are, respectively, OED, “queer,” adj., def. 1a; def. 1, “Special Uses,” “queer theory” (n.). Despite the homonymial, punning possibilities, “queer” and “query” do not, according to OED, share etymological roots.

3. For a thorough discussion of the “versioning” of Woolf as an iconic cultural figure of the female intellectual, see Silver.

4. See, for example, Gay. The S. Ellis introduction provides a useful summary of debates over Woolf’s relationship to the Victorian period.

5. See “George Gissing” (CE 1: 297–301) and “Notes on D. H. Lawrence” (352–55).

6. Woolf’s Modernist oeuvre canonically begins with Jacob’s Room (1922), her third
novel. This emphasis can be justified by Woolf’s own estimate of *Jacob’s Room* as the work in which she “[has] found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice” (qtd. in Froula 63). But Woolf made a similar assertion earlier, while writing *The Voyage Out*: “I should say that my great change [in working on successive drafts of the novel] was in the way of courage, or conceit; and that I had given up adventuring after other people’s forms” (qtd. in Froula 22).

7. On the readerly persona of Woolf’s literary criticism, see also Dusinberre; Cuddy-Keane; and Caughie ch. 6.

8. For another analysis of Woolf’s allusiveness, see Dusinberre.

9. Helen Ambrose explicitly rejects angelic domesticity in her mentorship of Rachel: “Nor did she encourage those habits of unselfishness and amiability founded upon insincerity which are put at so high a value in mixed households of men and women” (*VO* 137).

10. Although Potter’s and Daldry’s films and Cunningham’s novel have all been received as queer texts, they have also all been controversial in that role. For a discussion of the reception of and an analysis of the representation of queer sexuality in *Orlando*, see Silver 225–34.

11. For a discussion of the internal and external pressures of Victorian sexual ideology on Woolf’s representations of lesbian sexuality, see Cramer Introduction.

12. Moore, like De Salvo, reads *The Voyage Out* in terms of Woolf’s imputed psychological state while writing it, as “the novel in which Woolf is least able to transform her own material, and Rachel Vinrace is her most unsuccessful creator figure” (82).

13. Moments in which Helen experiences or expresses contentment with her heterosexual role abound, often in contradistinction to the dissatisfaction of less adaptable characters. For example, St. John Hirst, represented as more actively dissatisfied with heterosexual norms (and particularly with women), remarks with some frustration as he watches Helen work at her embroidery:

> “You’re absolutely happy” . . .
> “Yes?” Helen enquired, sticking in her needle.
> “Marriage, I suppose,” said St. John.
> “Yes,” said Helen, gently drawing her needle out.
> “Children?” St. John enquired.
> “Yes,” said Helen, sticking her needle in again. “I don’t know why I’m happy,” she suddenly laughed, looking him full in the face. (*VO* 233)

While we can register Helen’s elusiveness here—she is at once the Trojan seductress (Hirst calls her “the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen”) and Penelope, shielding her evasion of unwanted suitors behind her needlework—we have no reason to doubt her stated contentment. At the hotel dance, as well, she exhibits frank sensual pleasure—“She seemed to fade into Hewet, and they both dissolved in the crowd” (170). Helen is often elusive and not always admirable; but she is also often admired and sometimes even rudely direct. It seems to me precisely part of the “complex, multilayered style” to which Cramer refers that the reader cannot pin the narrative to any one attitude toward Helen Ambrose (or to Clarissa Dalloway or Mrs. Ramsay) nor fix Helen herself in any single attitude or identity—and this lack of fixity can itself be counted as part of Woolf’s effort to “begin to describe my own sex” (*Diaries* 3: 3), rather than as an effect of the repression of such an effort. See Froula 38–56 for a consideration *inter alia* of Helen as a “wife, mother, friend (especially of men), and complaisant mentor” to Rachel (46). For a discussion of Helen as the “Great Mother” see Moore.
14. For another reading of queer silence in the novel, in this case surrounding the character of Miss Allen, see Hunn.

15. Hirst is conventionally read as based on Lytton Strachey; see, e.g., Lee 210 and 252–54. Lee describes *The Voyage Out* as “euphemistic but clear about St. John’s homosexuality” (210), but I think the degree to which this meaning is “clear” might depend upon the reader.

16. Woolf sniffs, for example, that *Ulysses* (which the Hogarth Press declined to publish) exhibits “the conscious and calculated indecency of a desperate man who feels that in order to breathe he must break the windows. At moments, when the window is broken, he is magnificent. But what a waste of energy! And, after all, how dull indecency is, when it is not the overflowing of a super-abundant energy or savagery, but the determined and public-spirited act of a man who needs fresh air!” (“Character in Fiction” 434). On Woolf’s desire to “[tell] the truth about [her] own experiences as a body and speak the truth about [her] passions” (“Professions” 240) see Cramer introduction, 118; on her resistance to polemic, again in the context of a writer (Lawrence) particularly concerned with sexuality, see Cuddy-Keane 33. For Woolf herself as a polemicist, see J. Marcus, *Art and Ardor* chs. 5 and 6.

17. Important for any comparison of Hall and Woolf is the strong argument made by Jane Marcus for Woolf’s intertextual awareness of, inspiration by, and allusive inclusion of *The Well* in *A Room of One’s Own* (J. Marcus, “Sapphistory” 164–79).

18. See Barnes 91–99 for her complete discussion of the operation of sympathetic identification in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

19. The conditions that, in the antebellum United States in the 1850s, made *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* an electrifying public document—the union of a broadly popular genre (the sentimental novel), a mainstream religious form (Evangelical Protestantism), and a pressing public cause (abolitionism)—did not obtain in Edwardian and Georgian England. And Hall even before the publication of *The Well* was hardly as persuasive a public mouthpiece as Stowe. Her persona and history—daughter of parents who separated when she was young; wealthy; Catholic; more-or-less publicly partnered with a woman separated from her husband—connoted decadence rather than respectability.

20. The publication of a several biographies of Hall, including the most sympathetic and thorough, Sally Cline’s *Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John*, makes it possible for interested readers to have those responses not only to Stephen but also to Hall herself, given her anti-Semitic and proto-fascist inclinations (see Cline 336–37 and 360–61) and the predatory and manipulative elements of her relationship, in her last years, with Evgenia Souline (see Cline pt. 5).

21. Sir Philip dies when a tree that he is cutting down falls on him (115), echoing D. H. Lawrence’s strikingly homophobic novella “The Fox” (1923), in which a falling tree kills the more butch of two women, freeing her feminine partner to marry the man who wielded the axe. (On Hall’s interest in Lawrence, see Cline 269–70.)

22. On technologies of sexuality, see Foucault, particularly 116–20. On the medicalization of lesbianism, see Chauncey; on the “construction of homosexuality” by sexology, see Weeks. For a summary of some assertions of the negative impact of sexology on women’s same-sex interactions in particular, and also the possibilities for resistance, see Doan, “Sexology’s Intervention” 199, 211.

23. Epstein, who cites Laqueur’s account of the historical development of these forms (29–30), argues that “the case report . . . produces a context around groupings of symptoms and signs and findings and articulates these data into a narrative whose goal is to move toward explanation, therapy, and resolution” (75).
24. Storr discusses another case in *Psychopathia*—that of Ilma S.—in similar terms: “Even as Krafft-Ebing records his power over Ilma, he records her resistance too. The intensity of his treatment of her is, at least in part, a response to the intensity of her refusal [to be “cured”]. . . . Indeed all of the case histories in *Psychopathia Sexualis* reveal their subjects to be not just material, unruly or otherwise, for Krafft-Ebing’s categories, but complex sites of negotiation” (23). Some of the case histories, however, reveal this complexity more clearly than others. I am not the first reader to take Sandor as the most appropriate object for Stephen’s identification: see, e.g., Prosser 158; and O’Rourke 3.

But against such certainty, see Storr: “Hall does not actually tell us which chapter Stephen is reading. Even that section of chapter 4 which pertains particularly to homosexuality or ‘inversion’ is full of diverse possibilities” (12).

25. The identification is particularly apt to the extent that Stephen can be understood to have taken the place of the brother whom she was supposed to be.

26. For a discussion of the biblical narrative of Ruth and Naomi in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, see Cossslett 16–20.

27. As Sally Munt notes with justified skepticism, “It is lesbian folklore that Radclyffe Hall’s life with Una Troubridge”—one of the “two women” to whom Rule refers—“was a happy one. Perhaps we tell ourselves this in order to mitigate the pain of her fictional protagonist” (206). The more complex reality, including the inauspicious beginning of the relationship with Troubridge, while Hall was living with another woman, and the unhappy *ménage à trois* of their last years together, is detailed in Cline’s sympathetic biography (91–126, 311–78) and in Souhami’s startlingly hostile one (79–99, 288–416).

28. See Roof, particularly chap. 4, for another discussion of the “heteronarrative” domination of fictional conventions. The arguments of both Abraham and Roof have the effect of elevating historical (for Abraham) and experimental Modernist (for Abraham and Roof) narratives over those of the domestic novel tradition that Hall belongs to. For a defense of the romance plot in lesbian narrative, see Juhasz.

29. On relations between Woolf and Winterson see also Booth.

30. Artistic manifestos date as a writer’s interests and practice change; however, the editorial content of Winterson’s website, jeanettewinterson.com, remains consistent with the positions taken in *Art Objects*.

31. Winterson aligns herself with one of Matthew Arnold’s ideological descendants, Harold Bloom, on the necessity of art (AO 5–6).

32. Winterson herself observes, “I can find little to cheer me between the publications of *Four Quartets* (1944) and Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop* (1967)” (AO 41; also cited by Pykett 60n12). This notable lacuna in her self-construction has not prevented critics from analyzing her as a postmodern author; see, e.g., Doan, “Jeanette Winterson’s Sexing the Postmodern.”


34. Thanks to Elizabeth Young for pointing out the structural parallel between anagram and identification.

36. See, however, Bailey for a discussion of the role of the fairytales in Jeanette’s “narrative reconstruction” of her identity; Cosslett on Winterson’s use of the Bible, Mallory, and *Jane Eyre*; and DeLong’s Irigarayan analysis of Winterson’s figure of Tetrahedron. See also Onega ch. 1.

37. See Woolf, *Roger Fry* 33.


Schweickart, Patrocinio. “Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading.” In Flynn and Schweickart, eds. 31–62.


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