

Novel Epistemologies:
Rereading Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Reading Cultures

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reading cultures are reflected in contemporary academic and popular trends and ways of reading. I argue that we reconceive how literary value is arbitrarily structured by ideological formations of power. Like twenty-first-century literary scholars, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers were very much interested in the relationship between texts and their readers. By historicizing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discussions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reading practices, and ‘good’ and ‘bad’ genres, it becomes clear how ambiguous these categories still remain. Ultimately, my dissertation tracks ideological trends in the history of reading the novel, generating a discussion that resists traditionally linear narratives about taste and value production across historical reading cultures.

Chapter One examines scenes of reading in novels from the mid-eighteenth century and early nineteenth century in order to track how popular ‘early’ novelists distinguish between ethical and affective frameworks in conversations of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reading. Tracing these distinctions demonstrates how a problematically gendered lens of literary taste informs twentieth- and twenty-first century discussions about professional and recreational reading binaries. Chapter Two uses Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856) to argue that Barrett Browning offers a complex critique of these gendered reading practices by blurring the lines between genres and ways of reading. While Chapter Two analyzes *Aurora Leigh*’s hermeneutics of genre, Chapter Three looks at the text’s long and complex reception history. Comparing nineteenth-century critiques of the text to twentieth- and twenty-first century critiques shows that while *Aurora Leigh*’s literary value has always been framed through discussions of genre, genre functions in fundamentally different (and often contrasting) ways throughout the text’s afterlife. Chapter Four examines Jane Austen’s famously complex and tension-filled reception history to demonstrate how her fandom challenges the boundaries between emotionally absorptive styles of reading and more conventionally academic styles of reading. Finally, Chapter Five examines how contemporary marketing campaigns and Neo-Victorian novels have worked to reclaim Victorian texts for young adults while allowing contemporary readers to mix modern social, political, and cultural tastes with retellings of documented nineteenth-century events, characters, and movements. By examining a sampling of popular young adult texts, this chapter demonstrates how Neo-Victorian texts have altered the way contemporary readers engage with nineteenth-century novels in a way that both anticipates and responds to generic malleability.

Rather than focusing on a single period of time or a single set of texts, this dissertation weaves lines of connection and reflection between the reading cultures of today and those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Questions about how we define 'literary' taste and value are just as pressing today as they were over two centuries ago. Analyzing the anxieties and fears of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary cultures ultimately helps to shed light on our own.

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Introduction

In an 1820 essay titled “The Four Ages of Poetry,” Thomas Love Peacock satirically describes poetry’s demise:

when we consider that the poet must still please his audience, and must therefore continue to sink to their level, while the rest of the community is rising above it: we may easily conceive that the day is not distant, when the degraded state of every species of poetry will be as generally recognized as that of dramatic poetry has long been.¹

Today, Peacock’s essay is chiefly famous for inspiring his friend, Percy Shelley’s, “A Defense of Poetry” (1821), but it also functions as an example of the growing nineteenth-century fear that the isolated roles of the ‘genius artist’ and ‘poet prophet’ were quickly disintegrating. Indeed, the claustrophobic image Peacock paints of the poet’s inability to meet their audience while maintaining relevance, combined with the apocalyptic description of “the degraded state of every species” of their work, is indicative of the many anxieties surrounding the nineteenth-century ‘Romantic Author.’ With mass-produced novels rapidly gaining steam amongst an emergent and increasingly literate middle class on one side, and a growing appreciation of science, rationalism, and empiricism on the other, it is no wonder that nineteenth-century intellectual literary communities were uncertain where poetry’s idealized and ethereal role fit.

A little over a century later, who can forget the ‘death of the novel’ fears popularized by Jose Ortega y Gasset’s *The Dehumanization of Art and Notes on the Novel* (1925), or, even later, Umberto Eco’s call that electronic communication would spell a decrease in what he felt was an oversaturation of books (a fraught hypothesis given the exponential growth of books in

¹ Thomas Love Peacock, “Four Ages of Poetry,” *Peacock’s Four Ages of Poetry, Shelley’s Defense of Poetry, Browning’s Essay on Shelley*, edited by Herbert Francis Brett (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 19.

the digital age)?² As John Thompson points out, “few industries have had their death foretold more frequently than the book publishing industry, and yet somehow, miraculously, it seems to have survived them all—at least till now.”³ In the digital age, the rise in self-publishing options and e-readers has not only been a site of cultural angst about the future of (dying) traditional markets, but also a compelling reflection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century publishing habits and anxieties surrounding cultural values and ‘literary’ gatekeeping.

Perhaps in light of the market’s very slow ‘death,’ twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary scholars are investigating taste and value in new ways. The work of Pierre Bourdieu and, later, John Guillory, has helped to legitimize and frame the study of taste in contemporary theories of reading. Scholars including Rita Felski, Henry Jenkins, Claudia Johnson, Deidre Lynch, Elizabeth Long, and Jan Radway have emerged from this academic interest in taste and are part of a contemporary movement to validate often ignored groups of readers, to complicate the relationship scholars have to the artifacts they study, and to challenge and bring awareness to the construction of literary taste (even if these challenges are incapable of escaping hierarchies altogether, as Guillory makes clear).⁴ Questioning the construction of cultural taste and value is connected to taking seriously questions about both what we read and how we read.

² Umberto Eco, “Afterword,” in *The Future of the Book*, ed. Geoffrey Nunberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

³ John Thompson, “Preface to the First Edition,” in *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (2010; New York: Penguin, 2012), xiii.

⁴ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993); John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (1993; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008); Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults And Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Deidre Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Elizabeth Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Jan Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984; Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) and *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month*

This dissertation uses such scholarship to frame and understand how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reading cultures are reflected in contemporary academic and popular ideological trends and ways of reading. I urge that we re-conceive how literary value is arbitrarily structured by various formations of power. Like twenty-first-century literary scholars, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers were very much interested in the relationship between texts and their readers. Historicizing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discussions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reading practices, and “good” and “bad” genres, makes it clear how ambiguous these categories and distinctions remain. Ultimately, my dissertation tracks epistemological and ideological trends in the history of reading the novel, generating a discussion that resists traditionally linear narratives about taste and value production across historical reading cultures.

While it is slippery and problematic to trace the novel’s rise, it is equally troublesome to pose a teleological history of reading and literary taste; both fall into the trap of aiming for an ‘ideal’ form or end point while developing a narrative and canon that rejects or ignores outliers. This dissertation therefore attempts no such thing. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship has experienced a developing investment in affect studies and a renewed interest in the relationship between readers and texts. Though many scholars argue that affect theory and reception theory emerged out of a rejection of William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley’s “Affective Fallacy,” which at its core argues that the meaning of a text is not dependent on the reader’s reaction to it, I demonstrate how many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers and readers were absorbed in similar debates.⁵ The following chapters will build off of contemporary reception scholarship to understand how affect and reading function amongst academics and

Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁵ W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon* (1954; University Press of Kentucky, 1989).

popular readers today. By tracing the long reception of several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts, I suggest that contemporary academic investments in affect and reception studies have emerged from similar interests in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To understand the shifting fortunes of affect in the academy since “The Affective Fallacy,” it is important to historicize the very long relationship between affect and ‘serious’ reading from which the argument emerged from. Furthermore, as will become clear, it is necessary to examine how things like genre, gender, textual materiality, and reader reception are embedded in these conversations of literary taste. Rather than accepting “The Affective Fallacy” as the unintentional creator of reader-response theory, my dissertation will work to trace the contention between affect and the professionalization of reading over the last two hundred years.

Though more contemporary reassessments of reception and readerly affect work to build off of Stanley Fish, Hans Robert Jauss, Elizabeth Benzinger, and similar early reader-response critics, they don’t always avoid the traps Wimsatt and Beardsley fell into.⁶ More contemporary scholars like Michael Millner, Jan Radway, Deidre Lynch, Henry Jenkins, and Rita Felski offer compelling and complex readings of the history of affect and the political roles readers embody. Millner’s *Fever Reading* (2012) famously picks up the image of the affected female reader as a symbol historically used for ‘bad reading.’ He defines bad reading as “reading that causes you to lose a sense of self or free will, reading that is addictive, reading that completely absorbs you.”⁷ Millner traces this dichotomy of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reading to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century

⁶ See Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980); Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” *New Literary History* 2.1 (1970), 7-37.

⁷ Michael Millner, *Fever Reading: Affect and Reading Badly in the Early American Public Sphere* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012), xiii.

American readers, though I will show that this binary can easily be used as a lens for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British readers as well. For these readers, bad reading was often perceived as ‘bad’ because it was “too bodily” and caused people to read with “utter absorption, with a loss of distance, with a loss of self, or in a fever.” This eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rejection of bodily reading reflects similar tastes that align with more contemporary critics like Wimsatt and Beardsley. As Millner points out, part of the reason eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers were in such opposition to ‘bad’ reading is that the relationship between reader and book (as object) collapses--this makes the critical distance desirable for Wimsatt and Beardsley in the “Affective Fallacy” unattainable. In this regard, Wimsatt and Beardsley’s formalism can be read as an extension of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conservatism. While eighteenth- and nineteenth-century intellectuals used definitions of ‘bad reading’ as a way to police or criticize certain readers (women), twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics also frequently use definitions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reading in similar ways. *Fever Reading* works to reclaim “bad readers” by arguing that “these forms of bad reading produce powerful kinds of knowledge that are critical, reflective, and essential to modern democracy and the public sphere,” but Millner uses this argument to illustrate the fact that the “ideal of critical reading has a history.”⁸ He argues that it was the proliferation of print culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the mass consumption of texts that led to cultural discussions of critical reading as good and ‘affective’ reading as bad.

While Millner stays rooted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to make his argument, Rita Felski traces this divide between good and bad readers into contemporary institutional systems of reading as well. Her *Uses of Literature* (2008) argues that “enchanted”

⁸ Millner, *Fever Reading*, xiv, xv-xvi, xvii.

reading is perceived as a sort of “bad magic.”⁹ Enchanted reading works similarly to Millner’s bad reading in that both make it difficult to maintain critical distance and both are positioned as negative ways to critically read a text. Felski notes that enchanted reading puts a reader in the position to “lose one’s head and one’s wits,” which echoes eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fears about the boundary between self and object becoming blurred. In Felski’s model, readers become so engaged by their reading that they “feel themselves to be fully subsumed with an imagined world.”¹⁰ This style of reading has frequently been rejected by scholars in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries because it is antithetical to departments that value reading attentively, closely, and objectively--all of which becomes challenged when the divide between object and subject collapse. While close reading is valued, then, moving *too close* to the text is not, the fear being that the ability to use reason and think critically disappear. Felski challenges this conservatism by pointing out how the “role of criticism is to break [Enchantment’s] spell by providing rational explanations for seemingly irrational phenomena.”¹¹ This critique of ‘serious’ readers suggest that critics might also engage not only with critically reading ‘enchanted’ works and readers, but works by which they themselves are enchanted. Felski’s call to action puts into question the long-held binary of critical and affected readings, as well as subject/object relationships when it comes to reading ‘seriously.’

The twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship revival in affect studies and the relationship between readers and texts, has not been a completely linear rejection of Wimsatt and Beardsley. As will become clear later, early reader-response theorists like Fish, Jauss, and Benzinger ultimately end up developing a reading history that becomes a teleological aesthetics

⁹ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 57.

¹⁰ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 56, 63.

¹¹ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 57.

of reception. Under these interpretations, specific readers, texts, and ways of reading are still privileged over others, leading some iterations of reader response to fall into the very same traps the theoretical school was developed to react against. While twenty-first-century affect theorists have attempted to respond to these issues, cyclical (and new) trends and hierarchies emerge in similar ways. Rather than reproduce these problematic hierarchies, my dissertation aims to understand how they are generated by historicizing reader-response theories and “The Affective Fallacy” alongside mirrored conversations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ultimately this demonstrates how contemporary scholars are responding to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tastes about literary value. That said, these changes in the conception of what it means to read ‘seriously’ help to reveal readings of earlier texts while simultaneously allowing scholarship to become consciously historicized in the literary discussions it has emerged from. In this regard, challenging academic readings and definitions of readers and texts makes visible the ways in which criticism has long been tied to cultural value and production. Twenty-first-century affect scholars and scholars of taste and value hierarchies pick up these conversations, puzzling over the same concerns and discourse as their counterparts in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. Just as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers used affect to silence women and ‘novels,’ Felski, Lynch, Radway, and Milner (amongst others), demonstrate how we continue to do that today with ‘lowbrow’ genres and subversive readers. While we no longer suggest that there can ever be a complete disconnect from affect, we instead have placed a hierarchy on affective responses themselves, with more bodily or predatory ones (like sex) linked with low readers or genres, and ‘higher’ affects like critical distance (which remains, after all, a type of ‘affect’) with literary genres. By tracing epistemological tastes, my dissertation demonstrates how affect and reading have been historically used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to reflect and

structure formations of cultural power, while historicizing contemporary scholarly work within this tradition.

Chapter One grapples with questions about literary taste by tracing popular mid-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels that discuss and negotiate their own reception through scenes of reading. These texts often deliberately engage with understanding the ethical and affective parameters for guiding questions about good and bad reading (and good and bad readers) during a period in which the novel's legitimacy as a literary genre was highly contested. At the same time, I consider how these scenes of reading are used to contextualize the gendered reframing of affected reading which worked to police readers and ways of reading. Specifically, this chapter argues that the practice of privileging or rejecting affect within twentieth- and early twenty-first-century conceptions of 'critical' reading reflects and is reflected by similar binaries of taste in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I distinguish between the ethical and affective dimensions to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conversations of good and bad reading by historicizing and connecting them to gender- and class-fueled anxieties. Although these political tensions have seemingly always been present amongst texts and their readers, this chapter tracts the non-linear and complex history between affect and the novel, connecting early anxieties about material texts to the recent surge in popularity that emotion and object attachment have achieved within the discipline.

Following Chapter One is a brief intertext that expands my discussion of affect, reception, and early novel culture by focusing on the contentious relationship between Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and Henry Fielding's *Shamela* (1741). Instead of looking at popular early responses to these novels, I use them as a case study for reading against twentieth-century 'rise of the realist novel' narratives. Although critics like Ian Watt and Michael McKeon have

long read Richardson and Fielding as antagonistic rivals or two opposing halves to a whole, I consider how historicizing critical responses and readings of these two texts can open up new modes for reading early novels that instead align more compellingly with contemporary fan culture and fan studies. At the same time, I argue that while scholars have long rejected teleological readings of the novel's 'rise,' contemporary readings of these two texts are still widely influenced and shaped by twentieth-century generic constraints. By making this reception more transparent, I hope to open up new pathways for interpreting the histories of novel culture.

Where the first chapter asks questions about reading and readers, the second thinks about how questions of 'good' genres are integral for understanding nineteenth-century literary tastes. The primary focus for this chapter is Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), precisely because the text is historically situated in a sort of self-aware genre purgatory. Throughout this text, Barrett Browning frames her female heroine's reading against the highly gendered and exaggerated emotional states depicted in popular sentimental novels in order to offer complex critiques of gendered reading practices. By setting up an affective but structured hermeneutic, she attempts to reclaim absorptive reading practices that helped to popularize the novel and align 'good' affective reading with poetry instead. Despite Barrett Browning's clear privileging of the poetic form over the novel, *Aurora Leigh* frequently flirts with novel-esque genre conventions. Barrett Browning uses genre not for maintaining boundaries, but as a malleable and pragmatic tool to guide the reader through her literary values. By blurring the boundaries between poetry and the novel, Barrett Browning challenges aspects of novel-culture, both in terms of structuring plot and affected reading, while simultaneously negotiating *Aurora Leigh's* reception. Ultimately, this chapter argues that Barrett Browning's text offers a particularly useful lens for revealing the complicated ways in which Victorians understood

genre, while also demonstrating how these understandings and conceptions of value were deeply connected to larger social and ideological issues and changes.

Chapter Three picks up where the second leaves off by tracing *Aurora Leigh's* long reception history. Primarily, I examine how the text was assigned generic value in the nineteenth century, against how scholars in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries discuss it. I argue that while *Aurora Leigh* was once valued more for being an excellent poem (first) and a subpar or even inadequate novel (second), contemporary critics appear to value the text precisely for its generic fluidity and frequently privilege the text's role as a novel over a poem. This is a particularly important change because the very thing that brought the text's value down in the nineteenth century is what most contributes to its value and level of academic interest today. That said, there still seems to be a desire to think about *Aurora Leigh's* genre subversion, which makes it an especially useful text for interrogating how we think about genre, texts, and how literature gets assigned value. Tracing the ideological shift in how *Aurora Leigh* has been discussed and used offers insight into the radical shifts in how we read 'depth' in literature and ultimately suggests that depth itself is an ideological formation--one that continues to be central in literary discourse while continually changing and becoming redefined. Ultimately, I use *Aurora Leigh* to show that just as 20th- and twenty-first-century theorists attempt to use generic hybridity as a way to resist teleological readings of the history of the novel, they ultimately participate in those very same ideological and formal tastes.

Chapter Four builds off the interests and arguments of the first three chapters, by questioning how "good" reading and "good" genres are complicated by the contexts in which they are read. Here, I take up the long and prolific reception history of Jane Austen's novels--an archive that has historically been situated in the tension over the "right" way to read a text.

Indeed, Austen's popularity among both recreational and professional readers positions her as a uniquely useful figure to track the divisions between low and high culture, good and bad reading, precisely because her reception is famously linked to both sets of practices. This chapter reads Austen's complicated reception in terms of the affective relationship her readers impose on the texts in order to highlight the many boundaries and terrains her readers occupy: critical vs. popular ways of reading, affected vs. affecting readerships, historical vs. fictional models for understanding her value. As Austen fans make these boundaries visible by crossing them, straddling them, or dismantling them, they reveal how tenuous and problematic the boundaries constraining literary value really are.

Finally, the last chapter of my dissertation will further examine how fan culture and reception theory are reflected in contemporary marketing strategies. In this chapter, I explore how the twenty-first century has seen an expansion in the production of young adult neo-Victorian novels. From HarperTeen's *Twilight*-inspired editions of classics like Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, to Cassandra Clare's hit franchise, *The Immortal Instruments*, publishing companies are transforming the ways that contemporary readers interact with and understand the Victorian period. This chapter argues that young adult revisionist readings of Victorian novels and culture transform how we engage with the boundaries between genre, audience, and literary taste, while simultaneously echoing twenty-first-century scholarly interests in textual studies and reception history.

By historicizing and comparing contemporary shifts in reception and ways of reading against eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reading cultures, my dissertation highlights how twenty-first-century anxieties and trends are emergent from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century epistemologies and constructions of taste. Over the following five chapters, I consult an

unconventionally wide array of popular novels (from eighteenth-century ‘classics’ to best-selling twenty-first-century young adult franchises) in order to explore how contemporary conversations about genre, literary value, and reception are tied in complex ways to ideological formations and tastes. Tracing and historicizing epistemological trends present in contemporary popular and scholarly culture(s) over the last two hundred years demonstrates how twenty-first-century concerns about the state of the book (and even, to an extent, the state of the humanities) reflect similar anxieties plaguing readers and writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Chapter 1

The Plasticity of Affect and Gender: Scenes of Reading in the Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Novel

No one was in the shop but a well dressed elegant man, who was reading at a table, and who neither raised his eyes at their entrance, nor suffered their discourse to interrupt his attention; yet though abstracted from outward objects...he seemed wrapt in what he was reading with a pleasure amounting to ecstasy...from time to time rapture broke forth into loud exclamations of 'Exquisite! exquisite!' while he beat the leaves of the book violently with his hands, in token of applause, or lifting them up to his lips, almost devoured with kisses the passages that charmed him.

--Frances Burney, *Camilla*¹²

Published at the close of the eighteenth century, Frances Burney's *Camilla* (1796) is an important part of a conversation invested in questions about affect and the professionalization of reading that contemporary critics like Rita Felski, Deidre Lynch, and Jan Radway are continuing today.¹³ Scholars such as Jan Fergus and William St Clair have famously explored what and how eighteenth-century readers were reading;¹⁴ this chapter extends that important work by arguing that the practices of privileging and rejecting affect within twentieth-century conceptions of 'critical' reading reflect and are reflected by similar binaries of taste in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁵ By tracing scenes of affect and reading in novels from the mid eighteenth-

¹² Frances Burney, *Camilla, Or, A Picture of Youth* (1796; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 103.

¹³ See Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (MA: Blackwell, 2008); Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1998) and *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2015); Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984; Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1991) and *A Feeling for Books: The Book-Of-The-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹⁴ See Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ While the term affect is itself a complicated and ideological term, this chapter will not attempt to define or work within contemporary theoretical frameworks of 'affect,' 'emotion,' or 'sentiment.' This is largely because, for the purpose of this chapter, a schematic distinction can't

century through the early nineteenth century, I track how popular ‘early’ novelists engage with questions about affect (through sentimentalism) and to what extent it enhances or impedes the acquisition of knowledge.¹⁶ In doing this, I show that there is a shift between thinking about ethical and affective frameworks in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conversations of good and bad reading.¹⁷ Furthermore, I claim that this shift is necessary for thinking about mid-twentieth-century theories of reading with regard to how and why affect was separated from “critical” ways of engaging with texts.¹⁸ Making these connections visible might shed light on how late-twentieth and twenty-first century scholars embody eighteenth- and nineteenth-century

truly be drawn due to the fact that the meaning of each term is dependent on fluctuating historical contexts within which it is used. As my project is largely a historicist, long reception of how affect has related to various conversations about reading over the past two hundred years, resting on a single ideological definition would work against my purposes. While twenty-first-century scholars who study affect as a theoretical concept pull from continental philosophers like Heidegger to understand a range of bodily responses more extensive than the term ‘emotion,’ part of my project is to suggest that current investment in these definitions is in fact a result of a non-linear investment in affect (broadly construed) and reading--tracing all the way back to eighteenth-century sentimentalism, when affect was framed as an antagonistic response to a growing investment in rationalism.

¹⁶ To choose an archive over such a long stretch of time, when novels were produced in droves, will inherently be arbitrary. To combat this, I will be focusing on a selection of the chosen authors’ most familiar and popular books--that is, novels that have a reception history of (in some cases) centuries in order to further complicate and challenge twentieth-century-critics’ treatment of a linear history of affect and realism in the novel as a ‘new’ genre.

¹⁷ While I highlight a general epistemological shift in how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century intellectuals understood the relationship between affect and reading, I do not mean to suggest that this was a purely linear or teleological one--indeed, in many cases, critics have borrowed from both frameworks (and even hybrids) throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Similarly, while I do not take it up in this chapter, work could be done to consider whether or not there are analogous ethical and affective dimensions in contemporary discussions of reading and to what extent they are reflected in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reading practices.

¹⁸ See Jacqueline Pearson, *Women’s Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Pearson’s work is particularly useful here for framing the position of the female affected reader. In particular, she demonstrates how “different parts of the period had different anxieties and different solutions to the problems raised by women’s reading,” while connecting these anxieties to larger cultural shifts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (20). My work continues where hers leaves off, focusing on how these anxieties continue to shape how we read these historical novels.

discourse to repair this binary. Like their eighteenth-century counterparts, contemporary literary theorists are supremely invested in what it means to read analytically, critically, and/or affectively (a tension that has seemingly always been present amongst texts and their readers).¹⁹ Just as twenty-first century studies highlight how affect has long been used to resist and silence certain genders and genres in popular culture, I retroactively consider how similar hierarchies of value shaped the genre of the novel as we understand it today.²⁰ Historicizing contemporary critical approaches to reading can dismantle teleological and linear understandings about the relationship between affect and reading. While conversations about how to be a ‘good’ reader and what it means for a text to be ‘good’ have altered and shifted in some ways, the relevance of these concerns in the history of the novel has not.

The rejection of “The Affective Fallacy” has long been understood to inform and, in many ways, create reader-response theory.²¹ Wimsatt and Beardsley more or less define ‘bad’

¹⁹ Early institutional literary scholars are invested in a form of ‘close reading’ that necessitates difference between the scholar and the literary object. Bill Brown’s “Thing Theory” and much of the current conversation about ‘surface’ reading (via Best and Marcus and Heather Love) seems largely connected to challenging this reader/object binary. Burney’s *Camilla*, then, is particularly illuminating given that the dichotomy of bodily reading reflects similar patterns in contemporary textual studies research. See Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations* 108.1 (2009), 1-21.

²⁰ See Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, *Novel Minds: Philosophers and Romance Readers, 1680-1740* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Elaborating on the work of Robert Darnton, Michel de Certeau, and Roger Chartier, Tierney-Hynes examines how “eighteenth-century theorists aligned ‘intensive’ with critical, distant reading, and ‘extensive’ with absorptive, seductive, and unreflective reading” (4). Her work is useful for framing how transformative eighteenth-century philosophical values mapped on to a transforming culture of reading that continues to hierarchize readers and reading practices today. While I look at the intersection of gender, class, epistemology and affect in the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Tierney-Hynes examines how theories of reading were initially complicated and influenced by philosophical debates in the early days of novel culture.

²¹ W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon* (1954; University Press of Kentucky, 1989). While there is a tendency in reader-response theory to turn Wimsatt and Beardsley into straw men, I am more interested in the effects of their argument/how “The Affective Fallacy” helped to shape reader-response and reception theories as we understand them

reading as mistakenly confusing one's affective response to a text with the meaning of the work. This fallacy, along with most of the arguments published in the *Verbal Icon* (1954), attempts to rescue the literary text (the poem, specifically) from the "confusion between the poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*)," "that what a word *does* to a person is to be ascribed to anything except what it *means*."²² The assumption here being that the best way to understand a poem is to reach its unchanging, contained, meaning--or at least attempt to get as close as possible. This rejection of historicism argues that while affect might exist, affective reading is not worthy of scholarly study because it is not scientific--it cannot be repeated enough to determine literary value in ways that are concrete or useful.²³ "The Affective Fallacy" is a useful place to begin thinking about contemporary understandings of affect and reading because it emerged from a growing scholarly interest in historicizing the novel in a way that privileged mimesis and realism--a set of interests that can be traced to value systems attached to the history of the novel.²⁴

today--regardless of whether or not these frameworks were developed from problematic interpretations of Wimsatt and Beardsley's arguments. In this sense, the reception of "The Affective Fallacy" is far more important to my argument than the fallacy itself.

²² W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon*, 21, 26.

²³ There seems to be an influence of analytic philosophy in this argument, particularly to Karl Popper's argument regarding "falsifiability." This might be read as emerging, in part, from the long historical tendency for philosophy and literary criticism to be divided between reason and emotion--something that will be explored later in this paper.

²⁴ See Stanley Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," *New Literary History*, 2.1 (1970): 123-62 and Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *New Literary History*, 2.1 (1970): 7-37. It is not until Fish's "Affective Stylistics" that affect and readers become avenues of scholarly taste. Fish directly responds to Wimsatt and Beardsley, arguing that the text is more so an actor on the reader, than a container of meaning, that "what it does is what it means" (131). Fish expands the text to think about the action it has on readers on all levels: "what does this word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, novel, play, poem do?" (126). In this regard, reading becomes a slow process and meaning is defined as an "event" (128). While Fish's argument paves the way towards multiple interpretations, he rejects the text's meaning as a material object--it has no meaning independent of the reader and comes into existence as it is read. Where Wimsatt and Beardsley employ

Masculinity, Sensibility, and Affective Reading

To understand shifting fortunes of affect in the academy since Wimsatt and Beardsley, it is important to historicize the relationship between affect and ‘serious’ reading that their argument emerges from, particularly because this binary did not always exist. Though the eighteenth-century sentimental novel was not considered ‘high’ art by its early readers, it has been read as a response to the growing tastes for rationalism, empiricism, and humanism--as a genre that appreciates and illustrates the display of emotion. In the eighteenth century, sentimentality functioned as a marker for virtue and as a way to police and construct social norms, while simultaneously helping the eighteenth-century individual to understand and interrogate ‘human nature.’

Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and the early consumer culture surrounding it demonstrate how eighteenth-century novels were used both as a way to depict how affective reading could lead to moral improvement in men, as well as symptomatically police fears of affective reading among women.²⁵ Indeed, what is Henry Fielding’s *Shamela* (1741), after all, if

formalism of the text, Fish employs formalism of the reader--refusing to look at historical readers on their own terms and the plurality of meanings they uncover over time.

In the same volume of *New Literary History* that Fish’s “Affective Stylistics” made its debut, Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger argue for a diachronic approach in their rejection of Wimsatt and Beardsley--that reception should be collected over an extended time and examined to understand meaning. Under their method, readers are not the only ones up for study: “the literary historian must first become a reader again himself before he can understand and classify a work...before he can justify his own evaluation in light of his present position in the historical progression of readers” (9). This historicized reception is then examined for ways that it modifies and creates “horizons of expectation” to “determine [a text’s] artistic nature by the nature and degree of its effect on a given audience” (14). While their argument for “serious” reading avoids the flat reader Fish envisions, they end up privileging the unexpected and new--reading history becomes a teleological aesthetics of reception. In this regard, popular texts and readers not reading through a veil of aesthetic judgment drop from their equation of value.

²⁵ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

not a rereading and appropriation of *Pamela* that emerged as a part of the tension-filled affective response to Richardson's text?²⁶ These allegations against Richardson were largely connected to the Antipamelist fear that Richardson's text was popular because of its perceived pornographic subtext.²⁷ Fielding's adaptation make this critique abundantly clear through the character of Shamela; where Richardson's protagonist spends the majority of the novel rebuffing the advances of her employer, Fielding's does nothing but try to seduce him. In exaggerating *Shamela's* sexuality through satire, Fielding critiques the perceived bodily affective response *Pamela* produces in female readers by producing an overly sex-infused novel which reveals the original text as an inherently sexual object. At the same time, Mr. B. becomes a more virtuous character by reading through Pamela's letters--a process that holds the power to completely reframe his sense of morality.²⁸ As they did for Mr. B., Pamela's epistolary musings can be read as a mechanism for developing a pedagogical or morally reformatory relationship through reading. While Mr. B. is reformed in the novel, Antipamelists were less convinced that Richardson's novel could prevent female corruption through reading rather than promote it through sexual subtext. It was no accident that the culture war over *Pamela's* popularity was fought over whether Richardson should be charged with promoting female virtue or corrupting

²⁶ Keymer and Sabor's *Pamela in the Marketplace* (2005) has been invaluable for thinking about the reception of Richardson's novel. Richardson's text found itself amongst many arguments and debates--from the trivial tensions Keymer and Sabor point out surrounding the correct pronunciation of Pamela's name, to more wildly upsetting hits to political and social hierarchies.

²⁷ See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 202, in which Watt argues that "*Pamela's* popularity was due to the fact that it provided vicarious sexual stimulation." Keymer and Sabor's *Pamela in the Marketplace*, at length explains the tension between the Pamelists and Antipamelists, with extensive research linking the latter to a conservative fear of poorly-disguised sexuality in Richardson's text.

²⁸ Much has been written about how Richardson uses scenes of reading and writing to elevate Pamela above her station (for example, see Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation*, 25), but less so is discussed about how Pamela functions as a novel about masculine reading at the same time.

it; nor is it that the tension and moral panic erupted over a relatively new genre--the novel (and a sentimental one at that).²⁹

Pamela was simultaneously valued for the protagonist's virtue, and the novel's ability to impart that virtue on its female readers, while also being condemned for verging on the pornographic--an affective relationship with reading that has been consistently feared in various genres over the last two hundred years. The reception of Richardson's *Pamela* is deeply rooted in early fears that novel reading is capable of producing bodily affect in women while simultaneously promoting a combination of reason and sensibility among men. After all, Mr. B gains virtue by the act of reading--not until he has read Pamela's letters does he learn to control his bodily desires for her.³⁰

Henry Mackenzie's novella, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), participates in this epistemological trend of using the novel to construct male sensibility by detailing the emotional interactions and responses of its protagonist, Harley. Harley's value and virtue is defined by his ability to share emotions with the cast he meets, often described as sharing tears with characters along his journey.³¹ The division between reason and emotion is epitomized clearly in his character (and even in the fictionalized empiricism of the "found manuscript")--he is often taken advantage of by those he encounters and is frequently perceived as naive. Because of this

²⁹ Stanley Coen's theory of "moral panic" has long been used to frame social fears surrounding new media. See Ana Vogrincic, "The Novel-Reading Panic in 18th-Century in England: An Outline of Early Moral Media Panic," *Meijska istrazivanja*, Vol 14 no. 2 (2008). See intertext 1.1 for more on the relationship between *Pamela*, *Shamela*, and the "rise of the novel."

³⁰ Jane Austen challenges this gender dichotomy in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). It is through reading and, more importantly, rereading Mr. Darcy's letter that Elizabeth Bennet gains a better understanding of how she perceives the people in her life. Only upon coming to this rational realization grounded in Darcy's evidence does she allow herself to develop feelings for him.

³¹ Henry Mackenzie, Brian Vickers, Stephen Bending, and Stephen Bygrave, *The Man of Feeling* (1771; Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2009.

opposition to reason, Harley is more clearly aligned with emotion and valued for his ability to be affected. Being affected by the world becomes a marker for his masculinity. In one encounter, Harley encounters a farmer (Edwards) and “imprint[s] the virtue of [Edwards’] character on [his] soul” by giving “vent to the fulness of his heart by a shower of tears.” Harley asks Edwards to “call [him] also thy son, and let [him] cherish [Edwards] as a father.”³² This emotional exchange leaves Edwards unable to speak as he is overwhelmed by the transference of Harley’s affect--an affect that serves to bond the two men through a patriarchal framework. Harley enhances Edwards’ virtue by transferring his own emotional experience of the world to him. He not only produces a more grateful version of Edwards through his sentimentality, but does the same to a prostitute he encounters. The prostitute initially attempts to con the naive Harley into giving her money, but is so moved by his sympathy towards her condition that “she burst[s] into tears,” informing Harley that his generosity “is abused; to bestow it on [her] is to take it from the virtuous.”³³ Harley redeems her by telling her that “there is virtue in [her] tears,” suggesting not only that he is capable of affirming his masculinity through tears (as with Edwards), but in correcting and freeing a prostitute through them as well--for Mackenzie, masculinity and ‘virtuous’ femininity are structured through affect. Like with Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, *The Man of Feeling* becomes a pedagogical tool in which readers (through the characters) are taught the proper ways to feel, as opposed to the proper ways to think.³⁴

³² Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, 71.

³³ Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, 38.

³⁴ Similarly, the Byronic hero can be read as a reaction or reformulation of the “man of feeling.” Lord Byron’s characters were valued for their ability to be passionate but contained--affected in the right way, to the right degree, at the right time. Harley’s excessive sentimentality was replaced by a masculinity capable of both emotion and reason--suggesting that the two philosophical schools didn’t have to be completely removed from each other. Of course, Byron’s heroes could afford to be affected in this way--despite their passions and misfortunes, they were all upper class, so some of that sentimental masculinity can be mapped onto class privilege.

The Man of Feeling is interesting, not only because the novel contains affect, but also because it produces malleable affect in its readers--where Burney's novel offers examples of masculine affect and reading, Mackenzie's instructs the reader how to engage in affect through reading. More importantly, the affective responses to the novel are fluid and unstable, demonstrating how the intersections between modes of reading and affect are complex and dependent on literary tastes and epistemological trends. This affective response changes and is deeply connected to how different readers interpret the novel's significance.

In their 2009 edition of the novella, Bending and Bygrave argue that one of the reasons Mackenzie's text is important stems from the fact that its "transition from pathos to absurdity seems to have occurred within Mackenzie's lifetime."³⁵ They present a now famous letter that addresses Lady Louisa Stuart's initial experience of reading *The Man of Feeling*, with her "mother and sisters crying over it, dwelling on it with rapture." She explains that she "had a secret dread [she] should not cry enough to gain the credit of proper sensibility." This shows that the reader was expected to learn sensibility from Harley, just as the cast of characters do in his series of vignettes. Years later, Stuart recalls reading the novella in a drawing room of people at a social event. Instead of tears, the room was reduced to laughter over Harley's stupidity: "I am afraid I perceived a sad change in it, or myself, which was worse, and the effect altogether failed. Nobody cried, and at some passages, the touches that I used to think so exquisite--oh dear! They laughed." Here, Stuart discusses two different groups of readers at different moments in the text's reception. Both groups have strong affective experiences, but those experiences are very different. This suggests that affect and affective reading are deeply rooted in the social tastes of

While this marriage of sentiment and reason is often framed through Byron, *Camilla* uses Mandelbert's reading habits to form a similar balance.

³⁵ Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, xv

the time. They are not universal or unchanging. In this sense, affect becomes a useful tool for revising constructions of value in literary texts. This example also suggests that affective tastes influence critical and generic ones.

In the 1886 edition of the *The Man of Feeling*, Professor Henry Morley created an “Index to Tears” to accompany it--a list of all 48 times (with page numbers) that Harley can be found crying or weeping, with a note that “Choking, &c, not counted.”³⁶ Though clearly a form of mockery, this addition to the novel serves to demonstrate a changing response to sentimentality 115 years after the novel’s first publication--a macro demonstration of what Lady Louisa’s letter illustrates.³⁷ The critical reading for Morley becomes one that positions the reader in a place to reject or satirize the sentimentality of the novel. Indeed, the very inclusion of Stuart’s letter in the introduction of the 2009 Oxford Edition paired with Morley’s index in the appendices, suggests that the editors are positioning contemporary readers within this tension--that Mackenzie’s novel

³⁶ Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, 110.

³⁷ The shifting fortunes of certain affective responses might seem commonplace enough, but the objectivity of affect is still discussed in detail today. In *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Boston: Harvard University Press 2008), Jonathan Flatley looks at the affective relationship between readers and texts in order to move the affective experience from the personal to the collective. For Flatley, novels function as objects through which readers are able to engage with the “historicity of [their] affective experience” (4). Literary representation, then, allows readers to examine affect with a level of critical distance by removing the abstraction that affect is necessarily situated in and allowing readers to examine affect in more concrete and removed spaces (4). However, this mapping structure he outlines privileges “critical distance” as a marker of affective insight, which in turn privileges readers capable of locating and tracking affect in this way. Though Flatley frames affect as a historicist project, he also claims that affects are not reducible and that “in the moment of attaching to an object or happening in the object, also take one’s being outside of one’s subjectivity” (9). The text becomes an object through which readers can mobilize their affect, while also detaching their subjectivity in ways that allow it to become distant and readable. While Flatley’s project flattens readers and reading experiences, it also flattens affect by arguing that affective experience is fully contained, structured within the text, and universally experienced. *The Man of Feeling’s* changing and complex reception history, however suggests that this is a fundamental flaw in Flatley’s project and in understanding the relationship between reading and affect in such stable ways.

should be read historically as a sentimental one--but also that the affective reception history is significant to our own understanding of the novel. The privileging of this history influences the way that contemporary readers engage with this eighteenth-century text. Mackenzie's novella transitions from sensibility as a thing to learn from a text, to affect as a way to read or critique one. At the same time, this paratext highlights how the plasticity of affect continues to inform (and be informed by) our value judgments when it comes to reading.

The shifting sentiment surrounding the roles of reading and sensibility with regard to masculinity become more clear towards the end of the eighteenth-century. Burney's *Camilla* (1796) is a novel filled with affected readers, none perhaps so intense as the young Oxford student, Frederic Melmond. I opened this chapter with a passage from *Camilla*, in which the protagonist stumbles into a bookstore upon a public scene of reading. Camilla finds the absurdly enraptured Melmond, who pauses only to "indulge in passionate ejaculations," while the members of her party respond in degrees ranging from admiration to ridicule. The text has so much control over his reading that Melmond is only able to engage with it in random, emotional outbursts--a bookish enchantment that extends into his own version of reality. Upon reading a line from Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) about love and bliss, his eyes catch on Camilla's cousin, Indiana, and he immediately projects that inspired passion onto her: "she is all I ever read of! all I ever conceived."³⁸ For Melmond, affected reading has moved beyond his work and begun to infiltrate how he understands the world--he is a literary scholar whose close and enthusiastic attentions to his studies controls how he engages with the world around him, and never more so than during the process of reading. Through his extremely passionate reading, the boundaries between his books and perceptions of reality are broken down and altered. He uses

³⁸ Frances Burney, *Camilla*, 103

reading as an affective outlet and means for interacting with and understanding both the world and his place in it.

Camilla offers two competing versions of scholarly and bookish enchantment. While Melmond's excessive excitement transfers from the page to the physical world, Dr. Orkborne, the private tutor Sir Hugh hires for his niece, is similarly incapable of engaging with the world without the use of his books. When tasked with briefly leaving the house, Orkborne refuses to do so without loading his library into his arms and pockets. Sir Hugh enquires how he will manage to read all of these books during the brief four mile journey, and he responds by claiming that they are "merely to look into" and that "many of them [he] shall never read in [his] life, but [he] shall want them all" with him anyway.³⁹ Orkborne's engagement with his work is so thorough that he is no longer able to separate his own sense of self from the texts he spends all of his time with, and is often found to privilege the subjecthood of his books over his body: "he had rather at any time be knocked down, than see any body touch one of his books."⁴⁰ In many ways he becomes an even more attached reader than Melmond; whereas Melmond's reading seeps into how he understands and interacts with the world in an extreme way, Orkborne's engrossed reading consumes and defines how he understands his sense of self to the point that his books *become* his reality, rather than simply altering it. Both represent ways of affectively engaging with texts: one by way of passion more frequently linked to intellectualism and sentimentalism at the time, the other through a breakdown between subject and object.⁴¹

³⁹ Frances Burney, *Camilla*, 189

⁴⁰ Frances Burney, *Camilla*, 200

⁴¹ David Hume's *Dissertation on the Passions* from *Four Dissertations* (1757) is a particularly useful way for contextualizing how late eighteenth-century readers understood sentimentalism (notably, his work also offers a strikingly similar exploration of the bodily "desire" that contemporary critics frame affect studies through via Heidegger). Hume breaks the mind into "impressions" and "ideas," but unlike most who try to keep a firm barrier between the two, Hume considers how passions are connected to reason (even going so far as to suggest that

Neither of these characters are treated kindly throughout the novel. Burney provides two caricatures of affected readers who are not only scholars, but male, leaving Camilla to forge an early challenge to the binaries between ‘serious’ and ‘affected’ styles of reading. Camilla, however, seems capable of collapsing these categories and is often found desiring literary conversation, but also turns to books during some of her most emotional states--sometimes to explore her affected state, sometimes to simply provide distraction from it. Perhaps her emotional attachment to literature is treated kindlier because she is a woman, but she is sensible of the bookish oddities surrounding her. In fact, Camilla is so confounded by the relationship these two intellectuals have with reading, she even asks if there are “not sometimes young men who are scholars without being book-worms?”⁴² Underlying her investment in this question of course, is her keen desire to prove that Edgar Mandlebert is capable of acting as a foil to Orkborne and Melmond. Her hopes are affirmed, but she’s warned not to go “expect[ing] an Edgar Mandlebert at every turn,” since he alone has “spirit enough...without being ridiculous.”⁴³ Here, ideal masculinity is shaped with regard to striking the right balance between reading and sensibility, between reason and passion. Unlike Orkborne and Melmond, Edgar Mandlebert is able to marry the competing notions of sentimentalism and rationalism. *Camilla* is perhaps even more daring an example of affective reading than *The Man of Feeling* precisely because it

passions hold more power and importance of the two). He also considers how “impressions” are complicated by and interact with subjects and objects, which offers a particularly useful and literal way for dissecting this scene in *Camilla*. Most relevant of all, however, Hume links sentiment to questions of “taste”--a marker of taste and value that would grow to become increasingly problematic and relevant in scholarly conversations about genre over the next 250 years.

For more on how Hume’s philosophy helped to frame early theories of reading, see Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, *Novel Minds: Philosophers and Romance Readers, 1680-1740*.

⁴² Frances Burney, *Camilla*, 240

⁴³ Frances Burney, *Camilla*, 240-1

specifically critiques masculine sentimentality when sentimental masculinity was often framed in more desirable and ‘rational’ ways than sentimental femininity.

Scenes of reading in several of Jane Austen’s novels extend and complicate this “ideal” character trope--demonstrating how swiftly sentimental trends with regard to masculinity shifted in the early nineteenth century. In *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Marianne critiques Edward’s lack of passion when he reads and later rejoices when Willoughby reads “with all the sensibility and spirit which Edward had unfortunately wanted.”⁴⁴ Of course, as the title of the novel dictates, *Sense and Sensibility* is centered around finding a balance between extremes and Marianne’s appreciation of sensibility is tempered and critiqued as the story plays out, with Edward embodying the ideal traits of masculinity. However, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the reader is presented with the too-serious reading of Mr. Collins, who refuses to entertain novels and instead opts to read Fordyce’s *Sermons* “with a very monotonous solemnity.”⁴⁵ Mr. Collins’s austere personality is frequently criticized and poked fun at, leaving Elizabeth on the cusp of laughter at the mere thought of him “being run away with by his feelings” when proposing to her.⁴⁶ In these examples, however, scenes of reading are presented as a way to construct taste and value around Austen’s male characters--with bad readers (or worse, those who loathe reading) frequently mocked or critiqued.

Austen’s commentary on reading and masculinity is made more complicated by larger arguments about how sentimentality is bound up in discussions over literary taste and genre.

While even Austen’s earliest novel explores the importance of women reading novels,

⁴⁴ Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811; Hammersmith: Harper Press 2010), 48. This scene is particularly interesting in comparison to Marianne’s censure of Edward who left her “to hear those beautiful lines which have frequently almost driven me wild, pronounced with such impenetrable calmness, such dreadful indifference!” 17.

⁴⁵ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813; Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 52.

⁴⁶ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 81.

Persuasion (1817) takes it a step further by considering how the genre is connected to understanding masculinity.⁴⁷ Unlike most early critics of the novel who feared the effects novel-reading could have on women, *Persuasion* argues that poetry is the form of literature that tends to be too sentimental.⁴⁸ Captain Benwick is introduced as a sentimental widower who uses poetry to grieve his wife. He discusses his love of Walter Scott and Lord Byron with Anne Elliot, who notes that “he showed himself so intimately acquainted with all the tenderest songs of the one poet, and all the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony of the other; he repeated, with tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart.”⁴⁹ In fact, Benwick is so affected by his poetic readings, that they serve only to amplify his grief. Anne eventually “venture[s] to hope he did not always read only poetry; and to say, that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it sparingly.” As a result, Anne recommends that he read prose instead, which suggests that poetry is the form of feeling in excess--and prose the cure to correct the affliction. In this sense, Austen presents a Melmond-like affected male reader and employs a female reader to ‘cure’ or ‘correct’ him.⁵⁰ Granted, *Persuasion* is a novel, so it is in the best interests of the text to upset the eighteenth-century tendency to marginalize the genre. However, this example shows that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discussions about literary value were constantly confronting

⁴⁷ Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1817; Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts 2004).

⁴⁸ *Northanger Abbey*, of course, also offers famous insight on high/low generic boundaries while appropriating Lennox’s heroine: ““Oh! It is only a novel!’...or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language” (19).

⁴⁹ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 130

⁵⁰ This connection between Benwick and Burney’s Melmond may even be intentional--Austen was very familiar with Burney’s novels and characters.

readers about the place of affected reading. Austen's claims about affected reading and masculine sensibility are complex and nuanced, with these characters together suggesting that sensibility in reading is acceptable to an extent, but in life, too much sentimentalism is undesirable (Benwick is a little too close to Mackenzie's Harley for Anne's comfort). The shift from privileging radically sentimental masculinity to using the novel as a genre through which women could correct that affect, shows the change in affective taste towards the end of the eighteenth century while highlighting how relevant conversations about literary taste were framing and participating in that change.

Femininity, Affect, and Pedagogical Reading

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries were not only invested in texts that contained or defined proper 'affect,' but in attributing fears about 'dangerous' books to genres most frequently read by women--specifically, the novel. Jacqueline Pearson suggests that this was, in part, not only due to the emergence of a 'new' genre, but to the cultural anxieties over the "growing visibility of women writers and [the] commercial importance of women readers."⁵¹ While Burney and Austen use the novel to challenge and critique affected reading in men, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels also push back against the fear that the novel inspired dangerously affected reading among female readers. Indeed, many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels can be read as pedagogical texts about reading the "right" way. Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) both satirize eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fears that women were bad readers and easily manipulated by the fictional escapism present in novels. At the same time, novels like Charlotte Turner Smith's *Emmeline, The Orphan of the Castle* (1788) and Jane Austen's *Pride and*

⁵¹ Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation*, 22.

Prejudice (1813) offer compelling narratives about the positive effects of encouraging women to read. I argue that by exaggerating these fears to their unrealistic conclusions, and by offering pedagogical models for reading these turn-of-the-century female authors challenged the widespread cultural fear of novel-reading while paving the way for the genre's eventual cultural climb in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Female Quixote's Arabella functions as the perfect example of how not to read, but also of what not to read. Her library is filled, “unfortunately for her” with a “great Store of Romances, and, what was still more unfortunate, not in the original French, but very bad translations.”⁵² This resistance to French novels, or the desire to suggest that English novels were oppositional, is common amongst eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts attempting to raise the genre above the “lower” French form. Ironically, the narrator frames the French originals as less problematic than the English translations, perhaps suggesting they should never have been carried over into the English tradition at all.⁵³ Arabella learns about the world through these “unfortunate” stories and, as a result, consistently misreads her environment. She constantly tries to map the plots of her novels onto the new people she encounters--assuming every man is attempting to steal her virtue or kidnap her, and that she must maintain a steady balance of

⁵² Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote, Or, The Adventures of Arabella* (1752; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

⁵³ Of course, ultimately, *The Female Quixote's* use of chivalric romances is another nod to the arbitrary conditions confining literary tastes. Arabella's genre of choice was particularly popular and an elevated form of art in the middle ages. However, by the seventeenth century, the genre is determined childish and in problematic opposition to more “serious” literature (i.e. biblical). Lennox's awareness of this shift is highlighted by the fact that she appropriated Cervante's *Don Quixote* (itself a parody of a protagonist who tries to redeem the fallen chivalric genre). By Arabella's time, Quixote's chivalric tales had evolved into a more romantic vein, read primarily by women and the French. The rejection of this genre in eighteenth-century England highlights how literary tastes are deeply tied to hierarchies of identity and power.

coldness and affliction. Part of Arabella's confusion stems from the fact that she takes all of these novels as "histories"--assuming them to be based on real characters and real events.

Her misunderstanding of genre mechanics and conventions leads to her misreading of novels. Arabella presents her cousin, Mr. Glanville, with a passage from *Cassandra*, detailing a man's desire to die in order to stop the woman he loves from hating him. Glanville reacts by "stifling a Laugh with great Difficulty" and condemning the ridiculous princess.⁵⁴ Upon noticing that Arabella's reaction is the exact opposite, he determines to "preten[d] to be deeply engaged in reading, when, in Reality, he [i]s contemplating the surprising Effect these Books ha[ve] produced in the Mind of his Cousin; who, had she been untainted with the ridiculous Whims they created in her Imagination, was, in his Opinion, one of the most accomplished Ladies in the World."⁵⁵ Though Lennox's novel is read as a satire of bad reading and the fear of bad reading, this passage demonstrates and satirizes the very real fear that novels have the power to affect the female mind in an undesirable way.⁵⁶ At the same time, this scene is particularly compelling in that it exaggerates the plasticity of affect--Glanville and Arabella read the same passage, but both have wildly contrasting reactions to it. Glanville eventually professes a desire to "cure her of that Singularity" and to "banish [her books] from her Imagination."⁵⁷ Arabella's reading is positioned as an illness that is hindering virtue, not establishing it. Indeed, her reading might be viewed as a disease, in part, because it encourages her to feminize men in the real world. When she goes to her first Assembly, she notes that the men had "Figures so feminine, Voices so soft," and expresses frustration that "every fine Gentleman is an Officer," suggesting that "some other Title

⁵⁴ Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 49.

⁵⁵ Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 50.

⁵⁶ A fear that is later reproduced and challenged in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*.

⁵⁷ Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 197. Indeed, the use of the word "cure" is representative of disease discourse that was often used to frame the negative, bodily (affective) effects of reading in women.

ought to be found out for Men who do nothing but Dance and Dress.”⁵⁸ Here, Arabella suggests that the “ideal” masculinity is found within her novels, not in reality--her tastes around masculinity are formed towards older, more brutal depictions of men, rather than the more refined, feminine virtues that increasingly framed ‘civilized’ masculinity in the eighteenth century.⁵⁹

The reader of the novel is encouraged to sympathize with Mr. Glanville’s reading of *Cassandra* and of Arabella. The subtitle of this scene’s chapter even prepares the reader for this: “In which the Reader will find a Specimen of the true Pathetic, in a Speech of Oroondates.--The Adventure of the Books.”⁶⁰ Every chapter, in fact, is accompanied by a subheading detailing and mocking Arabella’s experiences and misreadings of them. The reader, then, is positioned to read the “proper” way by engaging with Arabella’s “bad” reading.⁶¹ Ultimately, Arabella is cured of her affliction by a doctor who takes the time to explain to her the difference between history and novels, good novels and bad. He even suggests that Richardson is an ideal novelist for her to read: “Truth is not always injured by Fiction. An admirable Writer of our own Time, has found the Way to convey the most solid Instructions, the noblest Sentiments, and the most exalted Piety, in the pleasing Dress of a Novel” (377). Richardson is valued because he effectively combines the moral and affective experiences of reading and Arabella learns both the right genre

⁵⁸ Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 279.

⁵⁹ See Pearson, *Women’s Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation*, 201-206. Pearson argues that part of what makes Arabella’s reading so dangerous isn’t just how she’s reading, but what she’s reading: texts about men who obey powerful women.

⁶⁰ Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 46.

⁶¹ Of course, this division is not always consistent--there are a few moments in the novel where Arabella’s misinterpretations lead to the most desirable results. While travelling, Arabella mistakenly thinks that a band of robbers are actually chivalrous men attempting to save her, a thought that shocks them so much, they leave her and her companions alone. Here, her “bad” reading is positioned as ironically pragmatic. And, ultimately, Arabella’s bad reading eventually leads her to a path of happiness and functions as a way for her to execute control over those around her (from random men passing through her town, to servants, her family, etc.).

to read and the right way to read it--in this case, through a text that teaches women how to be virtuous by tricking them under the 'dressing' of a novel. At the same time, the doctor suggests that the pedagogical relationship women have with romance novels is different from that of men: "[they] inflame our Passions...teach Women to exact Vengeance, and Men to execute it; teach Women to expect not only Worship, but the dreadful Worship of human Sacrifices."⁶² Ironically, while Arabella is taught how to read novels properly, the reader is in a unique position of knowing that the doctor's words aren't entirely true--for all the while that Arabella has been misreading her romances, the reader has been made acutely aware of her folly and absurdity. Most dangerously of all, Arabella's "bad reading" frequently leads to her misreading society, and she often mistakes members of the lower class for figures in much higher rolls, suggesting that her ultimate failure involves her subversion of the fragile hierarchies governing the world in which she lives.

Austen's *Northanger Abbey* adapts Arabella's bad reading and reframes Catherine's narrative experiences around the ideological battle over novel-reading. Just as Arabella views her world through chivalric romances, Catherine uses gothic romances to understand the social situations in which she is thrown into. Austen's narrator affectionately pokes fun at Catherine's bad reading, setting the reader up to immediately understand her as a perfectly average character who prefers her reading material to contain "nothing like useful knowledge."⁶³ While Catherine prefers novels to the more socially acceptable philosophical and historical treatises, her reliance on narratives in her everyday life never lead to as disastrous results as they do for Arabella. And, like with Arabella, Catherine's bad reading ultimately leads her to a happy ending with Henry Tilney--indeed, her innocence and social naivete are things that initially attract him to her.

⁶² Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 380.

⁶³ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818; Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002), 39.

While *The Female Quixote* satirically argues that the fear of bad reading is more problematic than bad reading itself, *Northanger Abbey* takes this a step further by placing the gender politics of reading novels against the gender politics of social interactions.⁶⁴ While the narrator sets the reader up to understand Catherine through the lens of a mediocre and realistic heroine, it is not her novel-reading that leads her astray, but rather her inability to navigate scenes of reading polite society. Catherine is unaware of the Thorpes' designs on her family, of General Tilney's belief that she is a wealthy heiress, and of the fact that people rarely say what they mean in social settings. However, at the same time, Catherine uses novels to successfully navigate her experiences and instincts in Bath and at Northanger Abbey. John Thorpe's scandalous reading of *Tom Jones* and *The Monk*, coupled with his rejection of reading novels "so full of nonsense and stuff" in the first place, immediately set his literary sensibilities against Catherine's.⁶⁵ While Catherine frames her understanding through novels, she is aware enough of the gender politics of the time that she corrects his misappropriation of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* with "fear of mortifying him." Catherine's more general naivete is counterbalanced by Thorpe's complete lack of awareness (both of novels and of Catherine's discomfort and disinterest), and

⁶⁴ See Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993), for more on how mid- to late-eighteenth-century "sensation and 'New Woman' fiction mock[ed] within themselves the belief that women read uncritically, unthoughtfully: the very characteristics which their authors were themselves accused of engendering" (15). Her book is also useful for thinking about not only how men policed female readers, but how women policed female readers as a way to exert "cultural capital" through censorship and condemnation (10). This extends beyond the conservative tradition, with Mary Wollstonecraft going so far as to famously condemn sentimental fiction in the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Flint argues that in conjunction with male taste-makers acting as gatekeepers, the complex terrain of female gatekeepers worked to "demonstrate the mid-eighteenth-century consolidation of the grounds on which Victorian attitudes to women's reading were to be based" (25).

⁶⁵ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 71. For more on enchanted reading, see Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

for the first time, Catherine reads a social scene with as much intelligence and irony as the narrator (and, by extension, the reader).

Just as Austen uses a character with poor taste in novels to elevate Catherine's tastes, she also uses Henry's emphatic novel-reading to earn the reader's sympathies while offering an avenue through which to redirect Catherine's more enthusiastic and problematic interpretations of reality. Henry's reading habits are perhaps even more desirable to Catherine precisely because they are framed through what today's scholars might call "enchanted" reading:

the person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid. I have read all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and most of them with great pleasure. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, when I had once begun it, I could not lay down again; - I remember finishing it in two days - my hair standing on end the whole time.⁶⁶

Here, Henry describes being completely absorbed in a gothic romance, but as he never slips into Catherine's blurred expectations between fiction and reality, his level of absorption is considered quite ideal. This, coupled with Henry's general appreciation of the novel and the narrator's long monologue on the importance of novel reading and the social fears associated with the genre helps to displace Austen's critique of gothic romances from novels themselves to bad readers and the fear of novels instead.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 120.

⁶⁷ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 58-60. At the end of chapter five, the narrator goes on a significant diatribe about the importance of novels. In addition to critiquing novel authors who don't allow their own heroines to read the genre, she goes on to argue that novels (of which, Burney's *Camilla* is explicitly named) are the "work[s] in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language." The narrator's uncommonly strong declaration not only interrupts the flow of the narrative, but proudly asserts that the rest of the novel will not bother justifying novels as art—as far as *Northanger Abbey* is concerned, that art isn't in question; instead, the novel takes up bad reading as its project and satirizes the displaced fear of "dangerous" fiction.

While Lennox and Austen often used satire to ridicule the fear of novels, Charlotte Smith's protagonist in *Emmeline* (1788) is much quicker to reap the benefits of reading. Like Arabella, Emmeline is raised away from society with nothing but her books. When her only friend and caretaker, Mrs. Carey, falls ill Emmeline "turn[s] in despair to...Spencer and Milton...the Spectator...an old edition of Shakespeare, and an odd volume or two of Pope."⁶⁸ Rather than resulting in her "disease," books become the spaces "in which instruction and amusement were happily blended." Where Arabella is ruined by romantic French novels, and Catherine (to a lesser extent) by gothic romances, Emmeline is improved through her "taste for poetry." But even so, her poetry is supplemented by her being "deeply read in novels" and it is through this reading alone that Emmeline develops all of the virtues of society.⁶⁹ Arabella's reading isolates her from society and reality (and prevents Catherine from properly reading social cues), but Emmeline's more 'desirable' literary tastes are what allow her to rise above society (indeed she is positioned as the most virtuous character in the novel, and the best mannered, despite growing up with only the company of a few servants). All three novels argue that there is an ethical layer to eighteenth- and nineteenth- discussions of good and bad reading-- one that works with and complicates the affective experience of reading. Emmeline takes this a bit further, however, and looks more directly at how novel-reading could not only avoid ruining female minds, but improve them as well.

Models of ethical reading in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels function not only as a way to instruct the characters about the "right" way to read texts and society, but also as a mechanism for training the reader. In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Elizabeth does not

⁶⁸ Charlotte Smith, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788; Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts 2003), 47.

⁶⁹ Charlotte Smith, *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle*, 103.

learn to correctly read Mr. Darcy until she reads his letter--only then is she able to understand her emotional state. Her moment of clarity, however, comes from a deeply affected state:

Her feelings as she read were scarcely to be defined...amazement...sense of shame....she read, with an eagerness which hardly left her power of comprehension...her feelings were yet more acutely painful and more difficult of definition. Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror, oppressed her...in this perturbed state of mind, with thoughts that could rest on nothing, she walked on; but it would not do; in half a minute the letter was unfolded again...she again began the mortifying perusal.⁷⁰

It is this seemingly never-ending list of emotions that encourages Elizabeth to change her perspective in the novel. Interestingly Austen devotes an entire chapter to Elizabeth's experience of rereading the letter, balancing between her changing emotional response and the desire "to examine the meaning of every sentence...and re-read with the closest attention."⁷¹ The reader in this case is taught that affect is not universal nor static, but capable of change and changing--and that reading is an excellent medium through which to learn about the self. Perhaps more importantly, Austen begins to challenge the separation between reading critically and emotionally by allowing Elizabeth to do both.

While the similarities between Richardson's *Pamela* and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* are ample enough to trace, it is the very reversal in gendered reading that is perhaps most important to understanding Austen's hermeneutics of reading. Where *Pamela*'s Mr. B. is improved through the reading of Pamela's epistolary moralizations, Austen explicitly switches the role and creates a space in which her female protagonist experiences the importance of

⁷⁰ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 156.

⁷¹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 157.

reading. At the same time, Elizabeth's impassioned and embodied reading frames her encounter with the written word through affect, but Austen's novel goes further in allowing her time to reflect on that very experience. This deep reflection of her feelings in relationship to how the letter changes her perspective on her world and the people in it, ultimately re-calibrates how she understands and interacts with it--offering a space in which the reader consciously combines the affective and ethical dimensions of reading. That a scene like this occurs in a novel is doubly important, in that Austen uses Elizabeth to teach her young female readers how to read in a way that is both affected and critical. Indeed, it is perhaps no accident that Austen's long reception and readership have been battling over how to read her novels the 'right' way.

Although these eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century texts recognize the absurdity behind the social fear of female readers, moral terror over the bodily affect of reading continued long into the nineteenth century. Kate Flint details the discursive "gastronomy of reading," that crept into nineteenth-century discussions of novel culture as Victorians began to theorize the psychological and bodily influences the genre had (particularly) on women.⁷² Periodicals were filled with articles urging readers to beware the frivolous and dangerous new genre. In 1859, *The National Review* published "False Morality of Lady Novelists," an article (later attributed to William Rathbone Greg in the Wellesley Index) which frequently suggests that novels are

⁷² See Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837-1914*, 51. In her fourth chapter titled "Medical, Physiological and Psychoanalytic Theory," Flint writes extensively on the late-nineteenth-century fascination with studying the physical effects of reading on women, as Victorians tried to empirically confirm the ways sensation fiction influenced female readers:

A sensation of any kind--such as that produced by reading an exciting novel, for example--would invariably transmit its agitating influence to the heart, and in the 'feminine nature' this would the more readily be passed along the penumo-gastric nerves, those filaments which connect heart with spinal cord and hence with brain. Thus it could be argued that anyone of a 'feminine nature' (most probably, though not exclusively, also biologically female) would by her very physiology be especially liable to the perturbing effects of literature calculated to shock and surprise. (55)

capable not only of affecting the mind, but of taking over the body like a disease.⁷³ Greg argues that poetry and “literature” are better texts to engage with because “their effects are less immediate and less direct; they work deeper, but they work slower...they affect the present age probably much less, but future ages infinity more.”⁷⁴ Novels, on the other hand are viewed as less controllable, acting on readers when they are “comparatively passive,” infiltrating the readers “like soup or jelly...rapidly absorbed into the system.”⁷⁵ The novel is described as an affecting object with the ability to influence and impassion readers when they are most vulnerable. Of course, the article suggests that the primary population susceptible to this disease was the female one: “who are always impressionable, in whom at all times the emotional element is more awake and more powerful than the critical, whose feelings are more easily aroused and whose estimates are more easily influenced than [men’s].” Affect is described as “awake” and “powerful,” capable of being “aroused” and “influenced”--an entity that is dangerous because it infuses women with agency. Novels themselves weren’t inherently bad--but, as Flint and Pearson suggest, they became dangerous when the wrong readers (women) read them in specific ways (affective).

While it is easy to read against the embodied reading experience in Greg’s article, the same discourse can be traced onto historical understandings of the differences between intellectual, ironically ‘close reading,’ and escapist, absorptive, enchanted, fun reading over the last century. In each of these bodily experiences, affective reading is critiqued precisely because there is a breakdown between the reader (subject) and the book (object). In other words, affective reading is often viewed as a means through which the text gains mystical power over the reader,

⁷³ William Rathbone Greg, “False Morality of Lady Novelists,” in *National Review* (1859).

⁷⁴ William Rathbone Greg, “False Morality of Lady Novelists,” 145.

⁷⁵ William Rathbone Greg, “False Morality of Lady Novelists,” 146.

disabling any sense of control and order. However, as this chapter argues, affective reading vs. scholarly reading isn't the true binary; indeed, affective reading is historically founded on the notion that these very binaries are ideologically problematic and arbitrary.

Chapter 1.1

Pamela and Shamela: Reading Against the ‘Rise of the Novel’ Narrative

Thanks in large part to foundational readings by Ian Watt, Michael McKeon, and Nancy Armstrong, the epistolary structure of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) has long been valued in history of the novel studies for its early integration of psychological verisimilitude into the novel’s structure.⁷⁶ Today’s scholars tend to reject realist teleologies with regard to the development of the novel, and yet readings of *Pamela* and Henry Fielding’s *Shamela* (1741) are still heavily influenced and informed by Watt’s “rise of the novel” narrative. Indeed, I argue that scholars fall back into Watt’s paradigm every time they read the two texts as if they are different rather than complementary narratives better analogous to today’s fanfiction. Instead, I examine how Watt’s interpretation of eighteenth-century authors emerges from the very contentious fan culture *Shamela* was initially a product of. At the same time, I suggest that historicizing Michael McKeon’s famous revision of Watt can open up new modes for understanding *Pamela* and *Shamela* in ways that align with contemporary fan culture and fan studies. Just as Richardson and Fielding function as a case study to demonstrate how fandom and appropriation culture have had just as foundational a place as realism in shaping the history of the novel as we understand it today, Watt and McKeon function as an example of how scholars impose generic boundaries on texts in ways that dramatically transform and shape how we continue to engage with archives and their long reception, consciously or not.

Pamela’s epistolary format offers a space for a single character to reflect on her thoughts and reactions--and, as Nancy Armstrong argues, Pamela’s ability to write and later reflect on her

⁷⁶ For this intertext, I will be using the Oxford World’s Classics edition. See Richardson, Samuel, *Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded* (1740; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

literacy become the very things to transform her into a modern subject.⁷⁷ In this sense, *Pamela* offers its readers a glimpse into the interiority of Pamela's character, as well as a glimpse into the domestic space and mind. It is important to note, however, that this level of interiority has been regarded as a relatively nascent one, in part because the letter is a performative genre that does not necessarily relate the character's 'true' thoughts to the reader, as well as because the information lacks any kind of verification.⁷⁸ We must take Pamela's word if we are to understand the events of the text (something many readers throughout the ages have had difficulty doing). Richardson's epistolary form does more than provide insight into Pamela's character, however-- it also provides a sense of realism. The text begins by stating its form: "a series of familiar letters from a beautiful young damsel, to her parents" with an assurance that the letters are based in "truth and nature." This, coupled with the retelling of Pamela's often mundane daily interactions informs the reader that Pamela deliberately abandons some of the familiar conventions of popular fiction.⁷⁹ Instead, readers are asked to interact with Pamela as if she were a "real" person. This allows readers to relate to her, regardless of whether or not they are able to see through this ruse, simply because the text asks them to.

Before *Pamela* was valued for these features in the institutional setting, the text was valued by a much wider audience for very different reasons. *Pamela* took the eighteenth-century

⁷⁷ Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 5.

⁷⁸ See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). It is important to note that while Watt identifies Jane Austen as the initiator of the novel as we know it, with her frequent use of indirect discourse and combination of Fielding, Richardson, and Defoe's internal and external approaches to psychological verisimilitude, he identifies Richardson as carr[ying] the process [of narrative realism] much further" than either Defoe or Fielding (26).

⁷⁹ In keeping with appropriation culture in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel culture, Austen's narrator in *Northanger Abbey* affectionately pokes fun at the tendency for female protagonists to record everyday minutiae activity.

marketplace by storm and was one of the first ‘novels’ to develop a complex level of consumerism that is mirrored in many pop-culture texts today. Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor are among several contemporary critics who discuss the immense market and cultural value of *Pamela*—a value that is often disconnected from contemporary understandings of the text.⁸⁰ This phenomenon, in part, is due to an extreme controversy that settled over the text after its publication. *Pamela* was the source of many arguments and debates--from the trivial tensions Keymer and Sabor point out surrounding the correct pronunciation of Pamela’s name, to more upsetting subversions of political and social hierarchies. Amidst this controversy, *Pamela* emerged as one of the first literary examples of consumer culture. Not only was *Pamela* consumed voraciously by the public, the novel also sparked production of many appropriations. That said, not all of these rewritings and reactions viewed the original text in a particularly positive light.

Henry Fielding’s *Shamela* (1741) occupies the realm of ‘negative’ reaction and remains the most popular *Pamela* spinoff and critique.⁸¹ In spite, or perhaps because of, Fielding’s hostile

⁸⁰ Keymer, Tom, and Peter Sabor, *Pamela in the Marketplace: Literary Controversy and Print Culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁸¹ Fielding, Henry, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews: In Which, the Many Notorious Falsehoods and Misrepresentations of a Book Called Pamela, Are Exposed and Refuted; and All the Matchless Arts of That Young Politician, Set in a True . . . Light* (Oxford: A. Dodd, 1741) Digitalized 2007. This text will hereafter be referred to as *Shamela*. As Keymer and Sabor argue in *Pamela in the Marketplace*, Fielding’s fictional response to *Pamela* was one among many. Indeed, in 1741 alone there were five fictional productions of what they term “counter-fictions--works that borrow from, comment on and pay homage to, but also often parody and subvert” the original texts, 83. After Fielding’s publication of *Shamela*, the majority of *Pamela* appropriations borrowed from his critical tone and derision. That said, the sheer number of adaptations, whether malicious or not, is quite familiar in twentieth- and twenty-first-century fan cultures, where entire franchises are built around poking fun at artistic works and genres with cultural capital. Because Fielding’s retelling of *Pamela* is by far the most widely read and recognized today, it is the primary case study for intertext--I merely point to *Pamela*’s cultural influence and presence as a way to further link my intervention into Watt and McKeon’s argument to fan studies.

mockery, *Pamela* might even be considered one of the origins of western fanfiction and appropriation culture as we understand them today. ‘Rise of the novel’ critics (and even those who mean to subvert them) mark *Pamela* as a foundational text precisely because of the tension the novel emerged from, created, and participated in. More specifically, interior valuation championed by these twentieth-century critics functions only when read in opposition to Fielding’s *Shamela*.⁸² The first part of my argument focuses on how ‘theory of the novel’ critics (specifically Watt and McKeon) restructure Richardson and Fielding’s narrative difference. I suggest that it isn’t until the ‘rise of the novel’ that the difference between the two texts, rather than their similarity, becomes the catalyst for how the texts are understood. This polarity is what has allowed readers to read *Pamela* for its attempt at a mimetic representation of the life of a morally conflicted young girl. Following this narrative, *Pamela* is able to function properly not only in Watt’s but also in McKeon’s explanations of the novel, while also retaining its value as a text ushering in the age of the realist novel. I then argue that this mimetic narrative is also productive for promoting and raising the status of the novel. Only in taking *Pamela* seriously as a didactic exploration of morality are readers able to engage with the ultimate argument the text makes: that through reading *Pamela*’s letters, the readers themselves become as morally full or deep as Pamela herself. As Deidre Lynch famously argues, in privileging the reader’s depth, the novel remains a marketable commodity for middle-class readers.⁸³ This argument about reading and depth slips away if *Pamela* is read against empiricist or realist expectations.

⁸² While there are many *Pamela* spinoffs, Watt and McKeon primarily focus on reading Richardson’s text against *Shamela*, so that will be my primary focus here.

⁸³ Lynch, Deidre, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998). Lynch’s project picks up refuting Armstrong’s famous claim about the history of the modern subject in the novel. Instead, she argues that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers used interior character development as a way to negotiate their role in an increasingly industrial and capitalist society (4).

By historicizing McKeon's reading of Watt, I hope to suggest that their critical approach has encouraged readers to pin *Shamela* against *Pamela* in ways that were once very productive, but may be less so now. Indeed few, if any, contemporary critical readings of Fielding and Richardson read the authors and their texts as a part of the same reverent literary consumer culture. Keymer and Sabor argue that *Shamela*'s "parodic disruption of the original text, later amplified in *Joseph Andrews*, gave early shape to a struggle of interpretation that has been remembered ever since as a duel between two canonical titans."⁸⁴ By pushing against this notion of parody as antagonistic, and by complicating what has long been understood as a tension surrounding *Pamela*'s consumer culture, I consider what happens if we instead frame the consumer craze of *Pamela*'s early buyers as an example of fandom, and not the starting line of the realist novel. By shifting affective and generic boundaries, the relationship between *Shamela* and *Pamela* becomes much less antipathetic than it is generally understood to be—rather than being seen as contrasting texts, they instead build off of and inform each other in less linear ways. Studying the reading history of such a focal point in the history of the novel, with emphasis on its institutionalization, might help to challenge and overturn the way we've been reading *Pamela* for the last sixty years.

Ian Watt has served as such an anchor in the history of the novel discussion in part because he was the first to mark the intersection between Richardson and Fielding (in conjunction with Daniel Defoe) as the spark of the modern novel, but also because his teleological argument continues to inform how we approach and engage with the two authors today. Richardson and Fielding offer such an ideal place for understanding the rise of the novel because they demonstrate structurally different approaches towards verisimilitude. Watt spends

⁸⁴ Keymer and Sabor, *Pamela in the Marketplace*, 1.

less time thinking about how the content between *Pamela* and *Shamela* relate (they do, of course, follow almost identical plots) and more time thinking about how the formal qualities differ. Indeed, he even goes so far as to claim that the three authors of his study “show so little sign of mutual influence and are so different in nature that at first sight” their complicated relationship can be difficult to identify beyond chance.⁸⁵ This statement demonstrates how strongly Watt’s argument is predicated upon a reading of narrative form. Rather than read Fielding’s text as one that is spawned from the very plot and content of Richardson’s, Watt places his emphasis on their structural difference. This difference, after all, is what ultimately sets up his final point, that the three authors individually used realist techniques in ineffective ways until Jane Austen found a way to marry them into one comprehensive and psychologically compelling narrative structure.⁸⁶ He goes on to claim that “the novel’s realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it,” which further solidifies his adherence to the importance of formal structure in examining psychological depth.⁸⁷ The trajectory he sets out, which can ultimately be linked through stream of consciousness in the likes of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, is deeply emblematic of modernist tastes and values, where formal originality is viewed as progress, reproduction as that belonging to the lower classes and genre fiction. Indeed, it is perhaps for this very reason that *Shamela* is so often read against *Pamela*, as a way to avoid comparisons to the formulaic nature of sensation fiction.

While Watt’s argument about the teleological rise of the novel revolves around a conservative reading of form, he does work to historicize that difference by directly connecting it

⁸⁵ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 9.

⁸⁶ Watt’s high regard for Austen is particularly interesting given that scholars have long traced how she appropriated and developed her novels from those of her favorite predecessors-- something which has situated her not only as a twentieth- and twenty-first-century fan culture case study, but as a product of fandom as well.

⁸⁷ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 11.

to the authors' backgrounds: Fielding, a writer educated in classical prose conventions, and Richardson, a less formally educated member of the working class. As Watt points out, much of the early resistance towards Richardson (and Defoe) stems from a criticism of his style of writing which was described as "clumsy and often inaccurate."⁸⁸ It was this epistemologically and grammatically imprecise prose style (even still, many questioned Pamela's verbosity in the explanations of her day-to-day life given the low position she occupied), however, that allowed for early explorations of affect and psychological depth, as it was responsible for making the character feel more real, immediate, and relatable. While many take Fielding as the more progressive of the two authors, Watt points out that historically this is not the case.⁸⁹ Despite *Shamela's* ability to poke fun at the holes in Richardson's narrative, Fielding is really criticizing the prospect of a middle-class voice. Indeed, most of the Antipamelist criticism of *Pamela* as a whole acts as a way to silence a class of readers and writers under the presumption that no lower-class female could behave as morally uprightly as Pamela does (and, similarly, no working-class writer can write something worthy of being considered culturally valuable). That Richardson was embarking on a relatively new genre didn't help to foster the text's literary status. So while Fielding certainly highlights some of the structural flaws in Richardson's writing, like his awkward tense changes and use of exaggerated reviews in the prologue to gain authority, his primary critique is rooted in a much more conservative ideological framework.

In reading *Shamela* as the parodic inverse of *Pamela*, the tendency to place these texts as opposites often negates or disregards some of the structural things that *Pamela* does: using a more realistic linguistic structure, bridging the gap between reader and character, and providing marketable evidence that classically untrained writers can succeed and are valuable. These things

⁸⁸ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 29.

⁸⁹ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 29.

are often overlooked in light of the polarization between the two texts, which generates assumptions that if a text can spawn a successful and popular parody highlighting its flaws, the original text must inherently be less impressive. While this continues to be the theoretical lens that determines how we understand the relationship between Richardson and Fielding, twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiences do not always intentionally read the relationship between the parodic appropriation and the original text under quite so contentious frameworks.⁹⁰ Indeed, one need only look at the trajectory from Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605) to Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), to Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) to understand the extent to which affectionately satirical appropriation shaped the early western novel. That said, it is important to identify how scholars continue to create a binary between Richardson and Fielding, lest they are at risk of participating in these same conservative and problematic readings of Richardson.⁹¹

The eighteenth-century skepticism that lower class women could be virtuous is directly connected to the allegation that "Pamela's popularity was due to the fact that it provided vicarious sexual stimulation."⁹² Fielding's sympathy to this view shows up through Shamela--a character who spends less time resisting her master's advances and more time trying to trap and seduce him with her body. Like most 'Antipamelists,' Fielding rejects this affective response that

⁹⁰ Indeed I would argue that contemporary adaptation culture tends to value similarities and differences in the content of each text (the latter of which often operating on humor or affectionate antagonism/easter-egg laying), paying less attention to the structural components and differences in the "fan" text. At the same time, twentieth- and twenty-first-century studies of popular culture reveal that scholars still impose problematic hierarchies around genres (Richardson's accessible structure and consumer-driven culture has been replaced or inherited by genre fiction like romance, fantasy, and mystery; the "literature" category merely a reflection of Fielding's pretension).

⁹¹ See Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) for more on the historical framing of parody.

⁹² Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 202. This quote is not Watt's own assessment, but his account of Dr. George Cheyne's assessment of "Fielding's most extreme accusation."

pushes the novel into the realm of a potentially sexual object; instead he wraps himself up in the conservative fear that novels have the potential to negatively influence the moral structure of female readers.⁹³ Ironically, as has long been pointed out, Fielding critiques the sexuality in *Pamela* by making it uncompromisingly explicit in *Shamela*. In this sense, reading *Shamela* helps to highlight and skew readings of *Pamela* by injecting the original text with “sexual stimulation” that may or may not have been apparent in the first place. Reading Fielding, in other words, helps to inform or alter readings of Richardson in turn--indeed, I would argue that the long tradition of reading Fielding against Richardson ultimately ends up highlighting the very things Fielding found repellent. The longstanding effect of Fielding and the Antipamelists’ critique of Richardson can be seen as plainly in the description of the contemporary popular Oxford edition of *Pamela* which reads: “preached up for its morality, and denounced as pornography in disguise, it vividly describes a young servant’s long resistance to the attempts of her predatory master to seduce her.”⁹⁴ This paratext, which is derived from the theoretical leanings of twentieth-century ‘rise of the novel’ scholars, pushes contemporary readers into the very same debate that frames the early contrast between *Shamela* and *Pamela*. This contrast, however, moves from being one concerned with form to one concerned with content.

Fielding extends his critique of *Pamela* by focusing on how Richardson’s social class and immorality infiltrate the structural elements of the text. Unlike Richardson, Fielding “did not break with the traditions of Augustan prose style or outlook,” which Watt argues can ironically

⁹³ Of course, Fielding could also be using *Shamela*’s behavior to suggest that lower class women would not likely turn down men who were demonstrably above them on the social ladder, or, indeed, that these ‘inferior’ women might even make attempts to trap or tempt them.

⁹⁴ Richardson, *Pamela*, back cover. It’s also no coincidence that this edition features an introduction and notes by Thomas Keymer, who works on historicizing *Pamela*’s early reception and tension, rather than contributing to it in the way that Watt does.

remove some of the “authenticity of his narratives.”⁹⁵ In other words, Watt frames Richardson’s rejection of literary conventions as a way to obtain the realist structure of the novel, while Fielding does the opposite--he upholds convention and style at the expense of realism. Indeed, if we are to read Richardson’s portrayal of moral obligation as mismatching the low-class status of Pamela, it seems only fair that we should also critique Fielding’s blind allegiance to structural virtue at the expense of mimetic techniques that were valued at this time. It is this major difference and failure between the two authors that allows Watt to build a cohesive theory of the novel from them. He positions *Shamela* and *Pamela* as competing versions of the “right kind” of novel, that only work when combined--through their difference comes the prospect of narrative coherence.⁹⁶ While there are moments where Watt seems to critique Fielding’s judgment of Richardson, and even suggests that he values the latter more, Watt still falls victim to his critique of Fielding’s problematic hierarchy of literary values in his rejection of non-realist novels:

With only a few exceptions the fiction of the last half of the eighteenth century, though occasionally of some interest as evidence of the life of the time or of various fugitive literary tendencies such as sentimentalism or Gothic terror, had little intrinsic merit; and much of it reveals only too plainly the pressures towards literary degradation which were exerted by the booksellers and circulating library operators in their efforts to meet the reading public’s uncritical demand for easy vicarious indulgence in sentiment and romance.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 29.

⁹⁶ Again, for Watt, this is achieved through Jane Austen precisely because she is able to mimic “Richardson’s psychological closeness to the subjective world of the characters,” while simultaneously using the “role of the narrator [to act] as dispassionate analyst”--something she accomplishes through free indirect discourse, which Watt champions as the ultimate development in the realist novel (297).

⁹⁷ Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 290.

Watt's privileging of realism over 'lower' forms of literature that both reflects and produces the tastes of and for broader reading publics is reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu's "game of loser wins" in which there is an indirect relationship between cultural value and popularity; or, in this case, value is bestowed on popular texts but in a way that resists popular readings (as Watt does with Richardson when he focuses on his formal qualities, rather than the escapist and scandalous content that ushered in *Pamela's* consumer culture).⁹⁸

While Watt's implicitly teleological approach to understanding the novel has largely been rejected, the way that twentieth- and twenty-first century critics engage with novels within his 'rise of the novel' canon remain shaped by the problematic value hierarchies he sets up. For instance, while Michael McKeon famously responds to and clarifies Watt's argument, he still maintains focus on the contrast between Fielding and Richardson.⁹⁹ McKeon terms Richardson's style "naïve empiricism"--which focuses primarily on the "found letters" argument that Richardson forwards. The largely unbelievable nature of this 'realist' attempt leads naïve empiricism directly to its own critique: extreme skepticism, which is how McKeon classifies Fielding's parodic response to *Pamela*. Despite this classification difference, both narrative movements function as a rejection of popular romance texts of the time, but extreme skepticism extends to also reject naïve empiricism. Under this structure, Fielding's form is placed in direct opposition to Richardson's, as something that logically emerges through rejection and critique. McKeon argues that extreme skepticism gains its prestige as it elevates and negates naïve empiricism. From here, McKeon reads Fielding as achieving a level of epistemological sophistication or advancement over Richardson. However, as Watt demonstrates, Fielding's

⁹⁸ See Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Field of Cultural Production*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁹⁹ See McKeon, Michael, "Generic Transformation and Social Change: Rethinking the Rise of the Novel," *Cultural Critique*, no. 1 (1985): 159–81.

epistemological arguments and prose are actually less progressive and new than Richardson's. McKeon's slightly conservative and problematic update to Watt's theories of the novel ultimately lead to the same conclusion as his predecessor: both Richardson and Fielding fail in that neither provides a way to produce a realist text--they only offer critiques of conventional or popular narrative practices. Though different, both are unstable, and they "attain stability not in themselves but in each other, in their dialectical relationship, as two competing version of how to tell the truth in narrative, which, in their competition, constitute one part of the origins of the novel."¹⁰⁰ Even while modifying Watt's argument, McKeon still ultimately contends that the realist novel gains visibility and integrity out of this key authorial difference.

Both Watt and McKeon rely on the public controversy over *Pamela* to construct their arguments about how epistemological change connects to narrative change. McKeon even goes so far as to point out that the "conflict emerges into public consciousness and is institutionalized as a battle over whether it is Richardson or Fielding that is 'creating the new species of writing,'" however he is also clear to suggest that his argument does not slip into this specific form of institutionalization. Instead, he asks readers to remove themselves from this academic battle and see the novel as something that emerges "as an experimental process consisting of many stages"-of which, the contrast between *Pamela* and *Shamela* is one.¹⁰¹ Ultimately, Watt and McKeon position Fielding and Richardson as competing versions of the 'right kind' of novelist and that they only hold merit to the extent that each fails on their own but succeeds through their contrast.

Though both Watt and McKeon recognize the historical significance of the *Pamela* controversy, both fail to acknowledge how their readings emerge from and propagate it. The contrast Watt and McKeon focus on is very different from the contrast fueled by early Pamelists

¹⁰⁰ McKeon, "Generic Transformation," 169.

¹⁰¹ McKeon, "Generic Transformation," 170.

and Antipamelists. However, while the contentious relationship between the two texts has enhanced their receptions, the contrast as outlined by Watt and further developed by McKeon has become the primary way for understanding Fielding and Richardson's relationship in academic discourse. I argue that this contrast has maintained stability for so long precisely because it helped to elevate the status of the novel in the mid-twentieth century. If we read *Shamela* as a parody of *Pamela*, and continue to read *Pamela* in McKeon's naïve empiricist vein, we are pushed into accepting Richardson's formal realism. At the same time, we are encouraged to read *Pamela* as an attempt at an honest revelation of a young girl's moral virtue and reward. Fielding's opposition to Richardson only helps to solidify this reading. Most importantly, it is only through reading *Pamela* as a realist novel, rather than as a parody of popular domestic fiction or a social satire, that we are able to engage with the interior representation Watt focuses on. We cannot engage with *Pamela* as a foundational text in the rise of the novel—in so far as the rise of the novel depends on a formal, teleological standard of interior depth—unless we read it as the “real” version of *Shamela*.

Reading *Pamela* this way responds to the emerging eighteenth-century middle-class desire to stand apart from the upper and lower class; but the trajectory of depth between these readers and our own is less stable than Watt suggests. Lynch argues that “psychological meanings did not come naturally to British writers and readers in the long eighteenth century” and, instead, eighteenth-century readers approached depth in a more economical way than contemporary readers are aware of doing themselves.¹⁰² In other words, psychological meaning did not stumble awkwardly towards progress, but changed as writers, readers, and institutions agreed upon rules governing these concepts. This suggests that figures like Watt and McKeon

¹⁰² Lynch, *Economy of Character*, 9.

were actually part of this “meaning making” process—that not only did eighteenth-century readers understand the *Pamela* controversy differently than we do, but that the same is true for concepts like depth and character. As Lynch points out, reading for Watt’s version of depth became economically profitable for novels. *Pamela* is such a fundamental text for this discussion because it offers readers a chance to absorb some of that depth. When we read *Pamela* as a realist exploration of a character’s virtue, we as readers become morally deep through the act of reading it (a different sort of affective response than the one Fielding feared). *Pamela* explicitly sets up the reader: like Mr. B, we are offered the opportunity to become better people by reading *Pamela*’s letters. This is appealing for all of the reasons Fielding resisted—it allowed the eighteenth-century, middle class reader to obtain an importance and value that was denied to the upper-class characters. In the same way that Watt and McKeon fail to recognize their own historicity in terms of the Fielding/Richardson contrast, they also fail to recognize how their own theories on the ‘rise’ of the novel are results of the same taste for depth, albeit redefined and restructured.

While reading for depth or psychological meaning still remains marketable today, historicizing our readings of these novels can open new ways of interacting with the texts. What happens, for instance, if we remove some of the antagonism between Fielding and Richardson and begin to read the consumer culture surrounding the eighteenth-century *Pamela* craze in similar terms with how we read contemporary fan culture--as spinoffs that evolve out of sameness? Reading Fielding and Richardson as familiars rather than opposites reveals how *Pamela* and *Shamela*’s complicated relationship and reception history is deeply linked to mid-twentieth century ideological and theoretical political frameworks that have continued to shape how we understand the trajectory of reading and genre, despite a perceived rejection of ‘rise of

the novel' narratives within contemporary academic circles. By revisiting how we continue to engage with these two texts as opposites (reading *Shamela* alongside *Pamela* will always shape and inform how we read the latter, just as adaptations impose interpretations on their originals), I hope to highlight how arbitrary and malleable the relationships between texts and genres are on a more macro level. At the same time, rejecting this antagonism can open up readings and theoretical frameworks that link eighteenth-century culture with twenty-first-century reading practices. Reading Fielding as a participator in early adaptation culture dismantles and allows us to read against realist novel teleologies while complicating how arbitrary the boundaries of genre are, as well as how powerful they can become once set in place.

Chapter 2

Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Hermeneutics of Genre

My prayers without the vicar; read my books,
 Without considering whether they were fit
 To do me good. Mark, there. We get no good
 By being ungenerous, even to a book,
 And calculating profits, - so much help
 By so much reading. It is rather when
 We gloriously forget ourselves and plunge
 Soul-forward, headlong, into a book's profound,
 Impassioned for its beauty and salt of truth -
 'Tis then we get the right good from a book.

-Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (1856)¹⁰³

Like many nineteenth-century novels, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) trains its reader how to read the "right" way. In doing so, the text makes two important assumptions: that there is a correct or ideal way to read a book, and that only through mastering that will the reader be rewarded with the book's metaphysical truth. Ironically, when she suggests that the proper way to read requires that the audience "forget [themselves] and plunge" into an "impassioned" book full of "beauty," *Aurora* structures good reading around absorptive reading, a way of reading that was most commonly associated with the novel in the first place; a framework that was used to contrast the novel against the poem when delineating cultural

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (1856; New York London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 1.700-710.

prestige and value. At the same time, by asking the readers to “plunge / soul-forward, headlong” into the material, the text’s hermeneutics not only aligns proper affect with “soul” and spirituality (as opposed to more physical or “base” affects) but in so doing, by collapsing the reader’s physicality also complicates the boundary between self and text (and, for Barrett Browning, between author and character). Aurora’s engrossed way of reading can be read as a resistance or response to sentimental novels, as well as to the “cult of sensibility,” and her use of the language of melodrama and sentimentality as a tool for conveying philosophical truths. In this sense, Barrett Browning privileges a more authentic emotional response to reading that mirrors changing opinions and tastes regarding affected reading. By framing her female heroine’s reading against the highly gendered and exaggerated emotional states depicted in popular sentimental novels, Barrett Browning offers a complex critique of gendered reading practices—one in which her protagonist’s affective states are tied to spirituality and emotional authenticity. It is through this affective experience in which the book’s materiality is complicated that the reader will be rewarded with the book’s “profound” or “right good.”

In this sense, Barrett Browning attempts to reclaim absorptive reading practices that helped to popularize the novel and align “good” affective reading with poetry instead by reframing literary value with the Romantic notion that poets are merely vessels for godly ideas and expressions. While privileging absorptive reading seems to parallel nineteenth-century novel culture in some ways, Barrett Browning recuperates poetry’s value by critiquing the literary market and reading “profound” literature against materiality and commodification. In this passage, Aurora argues that profits should not be the end goal or signature of a good book, and that when authors and critics spend time “calculating profits” to gauge a text’s value, they ultimately fall into an undesirable way of reading. This is not to suggest that profits and

“goodness” are inherently antithetical; indeed, the line she draws here is not dissimilar to the popular distinction between nineteenth-century deontological and teleological ethical systems when she points to profit as a justifiable “end” result, as long as poetry is not merely the means to that end but an end in itself. For Aurora, this passage critiques the tendency for nineteenth-century novelists to write with payment as the goal (a practice that became even more monetized with the popularization of the penny dreadfuls), rather than generating art for more “profound” reasons.

Aurora herself does not spend much of her time reading novels, but instead devours histories, essays, and poems--all of which she describes as poetry or “books,” and all of which are worthy of a reader’s emotional investment precisely because they contain the potential for “beauty and [a] salt of truth.” For Barrett Browning, as for her contemporaries, poetry wasn’t always used as a signifier of poetic form, but extended into aesthetic poesis, and was valued for its ability to produce a moment of clarity or emotional response in its reader. Indeed, *Aurora Leigh*’s plot functions as a *Kunstlerroman*, through which Aurora learns how to read (while also teaching her readers how to read her the “right” way) and therein becomes a “poet prophet” who works through the formal conventions of the poem. At the same time, the text teaches the reader how to value and engage with poetry, but it does this by dismantling and restructuring Victorian literary tastes and cultural production. Despite Barrett Browning’s clear privileging of the poetic form over the novel, *Aurora Leigh* frequently embodies the genre conventions of the novel, epic, long poem, lyrical ballad, and autobiography. What is more, the text is unusually reflexive of these categories. Barrett Browning uses genre, rather than for maintaining boundaries, as a malleable and pragmatic tool to guide the reader through her literary values. Her clear appreciation of the poetic form over the novelistic one does not mean that she rejects everything

the novel has to offer as a genre. In fact, *Aurora Leigh* is able to subvert generic constraints of the novel and poem by frequently cannibalizing and reshaping them. Throughout the text, Aurora navigates the difficulties of the literary marketplace, recounting the particular struggles of a female artist on the margins of cultural production as she tries to balance her desire to be published and well-liked with her literary ideals of what it means to be an underappreciated Romantic author. Critics have long argued that Barrett Browning uses *Aurora Leigh*, as Charles LaPorte phrases it, to “negotiate the marginalization she regularly faced in view of her gender” (831).¹⁰⁴ For LaPorte, this is achieved when Barrett Browning mirrors Alexander Smith’s similarly genre-bending *A Life-drama* (1853) and blurring the boundaries between fictional poetry and poetic autobiography.¹⁰⁵ I argue that Barrett Browning does something similar when she mimics and challenges aspects of novel-culture, both in terms of structuring plot and of affected reading, while simultaneously negotiating *Aurora Leigh*’s reception. However, rather than do this to gain prestige as an author, she relies on poetry’s perceived prestige over the novel and plays with novel-esque conventions in order to recuperate the reading public poetry lost in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At the same time, Barrett Browning and Aurora offer a layered, and particularly enlightened commentary on the literary marketplace and the speculated weakening of the Romantic author.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, *Aurora Leigh* offers a particularly useful lens for revealing the complicated ways in which Victorians understood genre, while also

¹⁰⁴ Charles LaPorte, “Aurora Leigh, A Life-Drama, and Victorian Poetic Autobiography,” *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 53, no. 4 (2013): 831.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander Smith, *A Life-Drama and Other Poems*, (1853; Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1859).

¹⁰⁶ See Timothy Laquintano. *Mass Authorship and the Rise of Self-Publishing*, (Iowa City: University Of Iowa Press, 2016) for a discussion of related contemporary anxieties. There seems to have always been a fear of the Romantic author disappearing, but as he points out, that fear still informs literary tastes and cultural production today; so while this fear has remained a prescient one, especially when it comes to new forms of media production and dissemination, it is never actually fully realized.

demonstrating how these understandings and conceptions of value were deeply connected to larger social and ideological issues and changes.

In the nineteenth century, the novel, perceived as a newer genre, was not valued as something “literary” or of intellectual worth. Instead, it was enjoyed as a form of entertainment or thought to be a harmful waste of time that was marketed towards women and the newly literate middle class. However, as novel sales began to increase, many poets became aware of and sometimes intimidated by the perception that more people were reading novels than were reading poetry. *Aurora Leigh* can be read as a text that aims to address both novel and poetry readers while offering a framework for pulling meaning from each. Though Barrett Browning was more interested in recuperating an audience for poetry than gaining money from that public, *Aurora Leigh*’s popularity cannot be separated from the economy, particularly since Aurora is so consistently aware of the connection between literary production and commodification. In this sense, despite being invested in protecting or preserving the poem as a genre, Barrett Browning was also creating a marketable product with the combined demand of poetry and novel consumers--a commodity that satisfied each while commenting on and critiquing both.

The relationship between fiction and the economy has been discussed by many critics, largely because it is so bound up in how we place value on certain texts.¹⁰⁷ Mary Poovey argues that Romantic views of “*literary value* made it difficult for authors of genres that were popular--whose values *as commodities* was unmistakable--to claim that their works were also valuable in

¹⁰⁷ See Deidre Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Lynch does a particularly good job of linking literary economic value to discussions of interiority and depth. Her argument helps to situate depth as a literary taste, which has greatly helped me to frame my own argument in this paper.

aesthetic terms.”¹⁰⁸ By the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of Victorian authors attempted to challenge this body of thought, which created tensions between different literary genres: “the rise in the popularity of novels--put pressure on the Romantic model of value that Wordsworth and other poets advocated.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, while novelists attempted to resist the hostile relationship between literary value and economic value, poets tried to maintain that separation. Barrett Browning, in many ways, attempts to rectify this discrepancy by using *Aurora Leigh* to straddle multiple genres and systems of value at once. As Gail Turley Houston points out, whether poet or novelist, however, “no professional writer could assert his independence from the market...the writer also came to be viewed as a commercial being deeply embroiled in concerns about profit.”¹¹⁰ *Aurora*’s fixation on the literary marketplace suggests that Barrett Browning was particularly aware that poetry wasn’t completely divorced from economic concerns, despite the genre’s tie to Romantic notions of literary value.

That said, while Barrett Browning was aware of the connective tissue between poetry and the marketplace, she used *Aurora Leigh* as a way to navigate the divide between popular literature and the perceived disappearance of the Romantic author. LaPorte argues that her “poetry often inverts the usual economies of art in a way that is more or less ‘systematic’ by routinely valorizing marginal figures as especially authentic voices of the broader culture...[*Aurora*] emerges from the gendered margins of the culture to write herself into a previously impossible level of critical centrality.”¹¹¹ In this respect, Barrett Browning marshals

¹⁰⁸ Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 285.

¹⁰⁹ Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 286

¹¹⁰ Gail Turley Houston, “Gender Construction and the ‘Kunstlerroman’: ‘David Copperfield’ and ‘Aurora Leigh,’” *Philological Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (March 22, 1993): 214.

¹¹¹ LaPorte, “Aurora Leigh, A Life-Drama, and Victorian Poetic Autobiography,” 832.

what Pierre Bourdieu famously phrases the “loser wins” modality in which post-Romantic artistic authenticity is inversely correlated to popularity.¹¹² By cataloguing Aurora’s slow ascent into literary prestige, Barrett Browning allows her to achieve the popularity of nineteenth-century novelists while still maintaining authenticity. Indeed, this is particularly effective precisely because Aurora distinguishes between both styles of her writing:

I struggled, -never stopped to note the stakes
 Which hurt me in my course. The midnight oil
 Would stink sometimes; there came some vulgar needs:
 I had to live that therefore I might work,
 And, being but poor, I was constrained, for life,
 To work with one hand for the booksellers
 While working with the other for myself
 And art: you swim with feet as well as hands,
 Or make small way. I apprehended this, -
 In England no one lives by verse that lives;
 And, apprehending, I resolved by prose
 To make a space to sphere my living verse.
 I wrote for cyclopaedias, magazines,
 And weekly papers, holding up my name
 To keep it from the mud.

.....

I wrote tales beside,

¹¹² See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

To suit light readers, --something in the lines
 Revealing, it was said, the mallet-hand,
 But that, I'll never vouch for. What you do
 For bread, will taste of common grain, not grapes,

.....

Having bread

For just so many days, just breathing room
 For body and verse, I stood up straight and worked
 My veritable work.

(3.398-328)¹¹³

In this respect, when both Aurora and Barrett Browning gain fame *and* notoriety, they maintain the Romantic author's authenticity precisely because they are able to distinguish popular writing for "light readers" from the poetry they wrote for "[them]selves/And art" (Barrett Browning herself didn't write fiction because, unlike her alter ego, she didn't need to generate the extra income; nevertheless, she remained aware of the fact that, like female writers, middle-class writers were also on the margins of literary production). At the same time, in creating this distinction, both women also highlight the struggling conditions of working class and female authors, or writers on the margins of cultural production, forcing the reader to confront the unpopular notion that while "art" might be connected to metaphysical ideas and ideals, it is very much grounded in bodily labor. While Aurora's eventual success in terms of her "art" can potentially be read as a critique of popular literature, Barrett Browning also makes a complex and subversive claim in these lines that blurs or challenges the gendered value hierarchies that

¹¹³ Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 3.398-328.

claim middle class and female artists aren't capable of critical recognition. Interestingly, she does this while dancing along the line of conservative Romantic definitions of authorship and more subversive definitions of authorship that include marginalized identities, using the prestige of the former to elevate the latter.

As the opening excerpt shows, *Aurora Leigh* frequently complicates the relationship between writing as art and commodity throughout the text, often rejecting the idea of the book as a commodity, while participating in its commodification. She takes up the Romantic tendency that literary and economic value operated on two separate planes--a perspective the novel was attempting to overturn--while using *Aurora Leigh* to occupy both. It appears at first that Barrett Browning is aligning herself within the poetic tradition of literary value; however, despite Aurora's plea to ignore the book as a commodity, she continually makes the reader aware of how present profit is in the creation of texts (indeed, even in her proclamation against calculating profits, she reminds us that Barrett Browning's text is inherently bound up in commercial culture). This tension is made all the more present by the fact that Barrett Browning ascribes to both oppositions at the same time: she writes a novel-length poem to widen poetry's audience, thereby making more money from her text, but she also aims to reject this in order to demonstrate that the poet prophet is capable of demonstrating truths to which the novel does not aspire. She attempts to align *Aurora Leigh*'s value with its "profoundness" rather than its profit (even though it is bound up in both discourses). Of course by highlighting Aurora's ultimate success as an artist, Barrett Browning fearlessly arbitrates *Aurora Leigh*'s reception by, as LaPorte points out, giving the protagonist not only critical approval but also the approval of a more personal, and therefore authentic, male critic--Romney--as a way to safeguard against the socially less convincing approval of a female poetess while also demonstrating that "her worth is

measured not by a general value but by an exceedingly select one.”¹¹⁴ Barrett Browning solidifies her own glowing reception here, but she does so by carefully negotiating her position as a marginalized taste-maker.

This focus on the profound over the material seems to be an essential marker for how Victorians thought about literary depth. Instead of a focus on interiority or character development, literary prestige comes from a place that responds more to metaphysical and self-reflexive interests. Not only was this hierarchy of value created as a potential resistance to the burgeoning novel market, but also as a reaction to major shifts in cultural, social, and spiritual beliefs. As religious beliefs became more plastic, the position of the poet offered a way to reframe these complex perceptions with authority. Though it would be impossible to explain within this chapter how the converging epistemological ideas gave birth to the specific circumstances to which Barrett Browning was responding, it is useful to take a look at how encompassing secularization was for the Victorians. Charles Taylor argues that secularization was more complex than it is often thought to be, defining it as that “which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others.”¹¹⁵ His definition is beneficial to this project in the sense that secularization is mapped as a change in options, not absolutes. Taylor discusses the phenomenon of the “nova effect” as one which creates a “steadily widening gamut of new positions—some believing, some unbelieving, some hard to classify—which [had] become available options.”¹¹⁶ In other words, god was once the only answer, and during the nineteenth century especially, god became one of many possible answers. For many Victorians,

¹¹⁴ LaPorte, “Aurora Leigh, A Life-Drama, and Victorian Poetic Autobiography,” 833, 835.

¹¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3

¹¹⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 423

poetry offered insight into mapping this increasingly complex new world, pushing the genre into a realm of metaphysical importance beyond what it may have experienced in the early romantic period.

It is this emergence of a plurality of beliefs that Thomas Carlyle, an acknowledged inspiration for Barrett Browning in *Aurora Leigh*, responds to in his essay, “Characteristics” (1831). In this essay, Carlyle identifies a system for sifting through the options, eliminating the worst. He offers the argument that in order for something to be considered truly valuable, it must be unknown: “‘Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth’: whisper not to thy own heart, How worthy is this action!—for then it is already becoming worthless.”¹¹⁷ According to Carlyle, the answer to this unconscious morality can only be found in literature, which “in our time...is the only branch that still shows any greenness; and, as some think, must one day become the main stem” of religion.¹¹⁸ It is important, I think, to clarify that this “literature” Carlyle speaks of most likely falls under the categories of poetry, philosophy, and history, which were the most respected forms of literature during the time of his writing—or at least, the only ones considered to be prophetic. He seems not to have been framing the novel as literature.

Aurora appears to endorse this kind of uncalculated reading to her readers when she asks them to “get the right good from a book” (1.710).¹¹⁹ Here, she speaks of books in general, but when later discussing the nature of poets, argues that they are “Of the only truth-tellers now left to God, / The only speakers of essential truth, ‘Opposed to relative, comparative, / And temporal truths” (1.859-862).¹²⁰ Not only does Barrett Browning offer the poet as a prophet for religion,

¹¹⁷ Thomas Carlyle, “Characteristics” in *A Carlyle Reader*, ed. G. B. Tennyson, (1831; Acton, Mass.: Copley Publishing Group, 2000), 41.

¹¹⁸ Carlyle, “Characteristics,” 53.

¹¹⁹ Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1.710.

¹²⁰ Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1.859-862

indeed going so far as to suggest that poets are metaphysically superior to everyone else, but she also suggests that poetry works best when it flows unconsciously and is not dissected. Though she seems to argue via *Aurora* that truth can be found through poetry, she does acknowledge that not all poetry is divine: “For me, I wrote / False poems, like the rest, and thought them true / Because myself was true in writing them” (1.1022-1024).¹²¹ However, by acknowledging this past of “false poems,” *Aurora* highlights her ultimate success in reaching truth through her poetry in another audacious move that structurally negotiates the text’s reception, for when *Aurora* succeeds, so too does Barrett Browning. Despite acknowledging this potential for falseness, *Aurora* calls on her creative counterparts to see in ways that other writers cannot:

But poets should
 Exert a double vision; should have eyes
 To see near things as comprehensively
 As if afar they took their point of sight,
 And distant things as intimately deep
 As if they touched them. Let us strive for this.
 I do distrust the poet who discerns
 No character or glory in his times,

 Nay, If there’s room for poets in this world
 A little overgrown, (I think there is)
 Their sole work is to represent the age
 (5.183-202)¹²²

¹²¹ Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1.1022-1024).

¹²² Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 5.183-202

Aurora's conviction that poets are the greatest truth tellers of their age seems to be a direct response to Carlyle's call for poet-prophets. Of course, this is made even bolder by the fact that Aurora is a female claiming to be one of these divine prophets who can see the world so completely, spiritually, and intelligently. Furthermore Aurora (and, by extension, Barrett Browning) seems to view Carlyle's plea as a purely poetic one, not narrative. Indeed, *Aurora Leigh* is a verse-novel which spends the majority of its time philosophizing about the nature of poetry. That Barrett Browning uses many conventions of the novel to accomplish this goal only adds to the irony and complicates the categorizations of value the text promotes.

Barrett Browning's conceptualization of poetry becomes even more clear in her discussion and approval of Carlyle. She points out that "no poet yearns more earnestly to make the inner life shine out, than does Carlyle" and refers to his work, "whether he writes history, or philosophy, or criticism...[as] a great poem with this same object;--a return upon the life of humanity."¹²³ Indeed, it is the very linkage between the poetic and philosophic that Barrett Browning admires in Carlyle's writing: "he is so poetical as to be philosophical in essence when treating of things...he is a poet also, by his insight into the activity of moral causes working through the intellectual agencies of the mind. He is also a poet in the mode."¹²⁴ This suggests that, like Carlyle himself, Barrett Browning values the metaphysical authority conferred to poets during the Victorian period. At the same time, Barrett Browning complicates the generic constraints of poetry, suggesting that the term itself deals more with poesis and philosophical content than form, when she blankets Carlyle's history, philosophy, and criticism with the term "poem." In this respect, it becomes clear that for her, *Aurora Leigh* is a poem first, not only

¹²³ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Elizabeth Barrett and Richard Hengist Horne" in *Aurora Leigh: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (New York London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996) 397, 398.

¹²⁴ Browning, "Elizabeth Barrett and Richard Hengist Horne," 399.

because the text is written in verse but because it ascribes to this metaphysical definition of what it means to be poetic; that the text also cannibalizes ubiquitous novelistic themes and structures in no way impedes this ultimate classification. While this complicates or challenges traditional conceptions of the Victorian novel/poem binary, Barrett Browning ultimately subverts them both by generating a new one, with poetry as the ultimate art form. But of course for her, poetry is more than a genre or formal construct, but instead seems to embody a frame of mind that at once displaces conservative assumptions about who can contribute to cultural production while simultaneously participating in them.

Barrett Browning's correlation between poesis and truth problematizes the division between form and content when it comes to how she understands the "real." Historically, scholars understand the nineteenth-century novel through the lens of realism, as authors experimented with ways to make texts "realistically" reflect the world they inhabited.¹²⁵ However, Barrett Browning uses *Aurora Leigh* to push back against the understanding that there is only one way to write the "real"--or, even, that there is a single version of textual verisimilitude. While the structure of the text resists the pull of conventional novel-discourse and keeps the reader consistently aware that they are in fact reading a poem, Barrett Browning poses important questions about the notion of absorptive reading and narrative form. *Aurora Leigh*, after all, is the story of a young female artist who experiences the very real truths that are associated with the literary market--she must sacrifice her version of "truth" or poetry to produce

¹²⁵ See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson. (1975; Austin, Tex: University of Texas Press, 1983); Georg Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1971); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740*, (1987; Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); and Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, ed. W. B. Carnochan (1957; S.I.: University of California Press, 2001) for canonical discussions on the 'rise' of the realist novel--from structural attempts to make the novel appear like a found document, to realistically reflecting the psychology of characters through form.

writing that more carefully aligns with consumer demand, all the while reflecting on the very poetic truths that Barrett Browning seems to value--in this sense, the text flirts with both metaphysical “truths” and more concrete and literal realities of Victorian life. The reader is pushed into a novel-esque plot, but the verse never fully allows them to “read” the text in the absorptive manner they might read more traditionally structured realist novels. They remain constantly aware that they are reading carefully constructed verse that doesn’t always easily slip into mimetic dialogue or description, despite the novel-esque plot development--the reader, like Aurora, is always mindful of the materiality of the book and of the complexities of surrounding literary cultural production. It is perhaps in this way that Barrett Browning distinguishes between the absorptive reading practices most commonly associated with the novel in the nineteenth century, which attempt to erase the very materiality that she highlights, and the sort of affective attention she promotes when telling her readers to “plunge/Soul-forward ... Impassioned” into a book (1.706-708).¹²⁶

Ironically, the artifice of verse and rejection of the novel-illusion are the very things that allow *Aurora Leigh* to embody Barrett Browning’s concept of the literary “real” on an analytical, rather than empirical level. Indeed, the binaries between poem and novel, masculine and feminine forms of writing, become even more compelling when read in light of secularization.¹²⁷ What does it mean, for instance, to suggest that a poem, which focuses on a priori thought (analytical) is “masculine,” while the novel, which rests on a posteriori thought (observational) is

¹²⁶ Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1.706-708.

¹²⁷ See Alison Case, “Gender and Narration in *Aurora Leigh*,” *Victorian Poetry* 29, no. 1 (1991): 17–32; Susan Stanford Friedman, “Gender and Genre Anxiety: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H. D. as Epic Poets,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 5, no. 2 (1986): 203–28; and Meg Tasker, “*Aurora Leigh*: Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Novel Approach to the Woman Poet,” *Tradition and the Poetics of Self in Nineteenth-century Women’s Poetry*, ed. Barbara Garlick (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), for work on how poetry was aligned with “masculine” writing and how *Aurora Leigh* worked to combat those norms.

“feminine?” Furthermore, what can we learn about Victorian literary values if there is a clear hierarchy between analytic and empiric epistemologies? Barrett Browning embodies and problematizes this epistemological and literary binary by structuring empiricism in the content of her writing, while maintaining her privileging of rationalism in the form. This allows Barrett Browning to work within multiple frameworks of the “real,” where the novel-poem not only offers a way to subversively think about gender dynamics, but also a subversive way to think about popular and contentious philosophical schools of thought.

Philosophical or spiritual jurisdictions were in part placed on the poet as a way of differentiating poetry from and elevating it above the novel, which was a relatively new form. Though poetry was often thought to be the higher of the forms, the novel’s audience was ever growing. Barrett Browning was not the only poet aware of this change, and certainly not the only one who feared potential repercussions from it. Indeed many literary thinkers in the nineteenth century were a part of a larger platform to increase value, justify, or reframe poetry’s place in light of the novel’s popularity. Percy Shelley concludes his essay, “A Defense of Poetry” (1821), with the well-known phrase that “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”¹²⁸ In many ways, for romanticists like Shelley, the poet’s value lies in, as Bourdieu phrases it, a ‘game of loser wins’ mentality, through which the “poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one” but only a select few with a prestigious enough eye for it can experience that level of artistic truth and engagement.¹²⁹ “A Defense of Poetry” outlines how poems act as “the very image of life...[while] a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connection than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect...a story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful; poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful

¹²⁸ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry*, (1840; Ginn & Company, 1891), 46.

¹²⁹ See Shelley, “A Defense of Poetry”, 6 and Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*.

that which is distorted.”¹³⁰ Romantics maintained their power in light of the rising novel culture, by generating distance from the mass, middle-class consuming culture.¹³¹ The more popular novels became, the more solidified poetry’s value was.

While many Romantic poets aimed to keep poetry separate from the novel in terms of morality and popularity, some Victorian thinkers saw the value of challenging that separation, or at least redefining it. Arthur Hugh Clough’s widely-cited essay “Review of Some Poems by Alexander Smith and Matthew Arnold,” originally published in 1853, argues “that people prefer ‘Vanity Fair’ and ‘Bleak House’” more than they do poems, and that in response, “poetry should deal...with general wants, ordinary feelings, the obvious rather than the rare facts of human nature.”¹³² Clough points to many of the culturally perceived differences in the two genres, and suggests ways for obtaining a form which incorporates the best of both. In many ways, Barrett Browning appears to be attempting this very thing in *Aurora Leigh* (though she often appears a little more disdainful towards the novel and popular texts than Clough sets out to be). Clough’s suggestion that poets attempt to mimic the “actual, palpable things with which our every-day life is concerned” echoes Carlyle’s--especially with his conviction that poetry should represent the reality within which it is written, not abstract affects or thoughts. In diminishing the distance between the novel and the poem, Clough also works to distance poetry from romantic ideals about nature and heightened emotion, focusing instead on more commonplace sites of emotion and experience.

¹³⁰ Shelley, “A Defense of Poetry,” 10

¹³¹ See John Stuart Mill, *Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties* (1860; Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1999) in which Mill uses poetry as a marker for prestige, framing it as a genre composed with “eloquence” in ‘developed nations’ vs. ‘savage’ ones. This is a binary division of value production that is still echoed in the literary marketplace today.

¹³² Arthur Hugh Clough, “Review of Some Poems by Alexander Smith and Matthew Arnold,” in *The Poems and Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough: With a Selection from His Letters and a Memoir* (1853; Macmillan, 1869), 360-361.

Underlying Clough's comparison, however, is a desire to broaden poetry's audience with that of popular novels. Barrett Browning delicately balances the everyday experience that Carlyle and Clough laud with the more exaggerated Romantic idealism in *Aurora Leigh*. While she sets up the text to follow the life of Aurora, she also tries to distance the text from the novel and frequently appears more disdainful towards the rising genre; indeed Aurora herself is constantly lamenting having to publish popular texts to eat, while relinquishing her "art" to her own poems in the evenings. At the same time, Barrett Browning uses popular conventions of the novel to broaden her text's readership while maintaining her already relatively well-defined prestige as a poet. This common Victorian desire to broaden poetry's audience and reflect more typical experiences rejects the common Romantic logic that there is an inverse relationship between the quality of a text and its popularity.

It is always a slippery practice to concretely address any author's intentions in their writing process, but Barrett Browning left behind quite a bit of material indicating her general hopes for her own text, as well as remarks on *Aurora Leigh* as a genre (not to mention that *Aurora Leigh* is at points autobiographical or at least representative of its author in many ways). On December 30, 1844 (twelve years before *Aurora Leigh* was published), Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote the now famous letter to Mary Russell Mitford detailing her early desire to combine elements of the novel and poem:

But people care for a story—there's the truth! And I who care so much for stories, am not to find fault with them. And now tell me,--where is the obstacle to making as interesting a story of a poem as of a prose work—Echo answers where. Conversations & events, why may they not be given as rapidly & passionately & lucidly in verse as in prose—echo answers why...I want to write a poem of a new class, in a measure—a Don Juan, without

the mockery & impurity, .. under one aspect, --& having unity, as a work of art,--& admitting of as much philosophical dreaming & digression (which is in fact a characteristic of the age) as I like to use.¹³³

This selection is compelling because not only does Barrett Browning explicitly state how she hopes to combine elements of story (prose) with the more philosophical discussions typically found in poetry, giving academics a unique angle into her authorial intentions, but she also seems to concretely define such a combination as a poem, not as a novel. Her delineation here seems to suggest that novels are only capable of interesting plots and characters, whereas poems can be pushed to accomplish those things in a more philosophical or valuable frame. And if she doesn't foster the binary between novels and poems here, she at least offers a binary between ways of reading, pinning philosophical reading against escapism. Furthermore, her recognition that people "care" for stories echoes Clough's point that novels were growing more popular, and simultaneously suggests that Barrett Browning was setting out to intrigue that particular audience and re-engage them with poetry. Unlike some critics of the time, Barrett Browning does not disparage the novel as a genre for the affective responses it elicits amongst readers; rather, she wants to reinvigorate poetry with that same level of engagement and experience. In this way, *Aurora Leigh's* basic and familiar plot line (one that does not stray far from *Jane Eyre* or *Pride and Prejudice*) could be used to make poetry more "interesting" for an audience primarily hoping to be entertained rather than taught philosophy through verse; at the same time, the text demonstrates that poetry is capable of doing everything a novel does and more.

Barrett Browning's preference for poetry as a genre over fiction is clear not only in the previous letter to Mary Russell Mitford and the poetic content and discussion in *Aurora Leigh*,

¹³³ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, 1836-1854*, (Waco: Wedgestone Pr, 1983), 49.

but also in her treatment of other female novelists. In another letter to Mitford dated March 8, 1843, Barrett Browning writes that she “confess[es] [her] surprise at [Mitford] considering Miss Edgeworth & Miss Austen mistresses in pathos...they are excellent & admirable—but [she] cannot say, poetical & passionate.”¹³⁴ Her disdain for Austen can be traced in the correspondence between these two women and the majority of her issues with the novelist stem from Austen’s inability to create a poetic interpretation of the world around her:

My very dear friend, I no more think of denying her [Austen] perfection in her sphere, than I deny the rainy-ness of this May .. or rather of that May—for suddenly I remember that it has struck June! She is perfect in what she attempts—she is admirable in all that she undertakes: but the excellence lies, I do hold, rather in the execution than the aspiration. It is a narrow, earthly, & essentially unpoetical view of life: it is only half a true view. Her human creatures never look up; and when they look within it is not deeply. We rise from her books, .. amused, pleased .. charmed, if you like it .. but elevated & purified in soul, we never rise...She is, I must repeat my persuasion, essentially unpoetical.¹³⁵

It is clear that Barrett Browning views Austen’s abilities as a novelist to be perfect “in her sphere,” but no “excellence” lies in pure prose, and her inadequacies in the realm of poetry make her ‘unelevated’ and less worthwhile. Her suggestion that Austen lacks depth is particularly

¹³⁴ Browning, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, 1836-1854*, 1-2.

¹³⁵ Browning, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, 1836-1854*, 163. Browning does write fondly of Charles Dickens. This might, in part, be because she admired his portrayal of and sympathy for the lower and middle classes. While I do not think she would agree that he offered the poetic “double vision” of the world, it is entirely possible she admired his work from a moral standpoint, if not a metaphysical one. Indeed, like Alexander Smith’s *A Life Drama*, Dickensian characters often operated from the margins of cultural production.

interesting in light of contemporary theories of the novel, which frequently valorize Austen for her use of free indirect discourse and character development.¹³⁶ Her critique of Austen's characters "looking within" but "not deeply" suggests different constructions of depth between nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary intellectuals, for the latter the term was often measured in form or narrative structure, whereas for Barrett Browning, depth was much more about reflection. Indeed, the claim that Austen only sees "half a true view" connects back to Aurora's call for poets to exert a "double vision."

Barrett Browning's framing of Austen is particularly telling in light of her understanding of the poet's role as a sort of prophet. Austen's novels deal a great deal with religion and virtue, but Barrett Browning doesn't classify these elements of her novels as poetic. This seems to suggest that the "spirituality" Barrett Browning works with as a framework for defining the poetic extends more into philosophical and metaphysical spaces--a notion that would be quite subversive for a nineteenth-century author to maintain, not least of all a female one. It is important to point out, however, that her frequent discussions about Austen are sparked in large part by Mitford's deep admiration for her (Austen was, in fact, a point of playful debate between the two) and that Barrett Browning did not dislike all novelists. For instance, she once asked Mitford to consider Inchbald and Bulwer, "who [though he] is full of faults, he is a poet when he writes prose, & the spirit-world therefore presses around & pierces into sight through the material world as he contemplates it."¹³⁷ Bulwer's ability to see the Swedenborgian "spirit world" confers upon him the role of a true poet, just as Barrett Browning bestows the same distinction upon Carlyle. I include her remarks against Austen, then, as way to situate her value

¹³⁶ Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* is particularly responsible for recuperating Austen as a marker of novelistic depth.

¹³⁷ Browning, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, 1836-1854*, 214.

system as one that evaluates the novel as a genre in terms of poetry, as well as one that evaluates “depth” in terms of metaphysical reflection and the relationship between readers and texts.

For Barrett Browning, Austen fails to live up to her definition of metaphysical truth because her novels are grounded purely in the everyday, whereas Aurora (and by extension Barrett Browning) is able to mirror her observations of the physical world onto the spiritual one. This image of the “double vision” poetess is reflected throughout *Aurora Leigh*:

There, Jove’s hand grips us! - For we stand here, we,
 If genuine artists, witnessing for God’s
 Complete, consummate, undivided work;
 - That every natural flower which grows on earth
 Implies a flower upon the spiritual side,
 Substantial, archetypal, all a-glow
 With blossoming causes, - not so far away,
 But we, whose spirit-sense is somewhat cleared,
 May catch at something of the bloom and breath , -
 Too vaguely apprehended, though indeed
 Still apprehended, consciously or not,
 And still transferred to picture, music, verse,
 For thrilling audient and beholding souls
 By signs and touches which are known to souls.
 (7. 837-850)¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 7. 837-850. This theme of the spirit world and Swedenborgism are echoed earlier in the text:

Our heart drives blood. There’s not a flower of spring
 That dies ere June, but vaunts itself allied

Barrett Browning's poetic hermeneutic is perhaps most clear in his passage, where Aurora ties in the role of a good poet with Swedenborgian ideals of a mirrored spiritual sphere. Because Austen (nor "her human creatures") "never look[s] up" to recognize this metaphysical plane, she does not obtain "excellence" in Barrett Browning's eyes. Interestingly, Barrett Browning also seems to link reflection and depth with the reader, extending her critique of Austen to the claim that "elevated & purified in soul, we never rise." This suggests that Barrett Browning places great importance not on the text as an isolated object, but on the relationship between readers and texts--and on the level of intellectual or spiritual growth that a reader may experience while engaging with a text. Aurora reaffirms the importance of this relationship between poet and audience when she claims that art when "fully recognized, would change the world / And shift its morals. If a man could feel / Not one day, in the artist's ecstasy" (7. 856-858).¹³⁹ *Aurora Leigh* suggests that a poem's value lies in its ability to demystify the moral and metaphysical truths of the world.

Barrett Browning's delineation between prose and poetry is quite similar to John Stuart Mill's in that neither of them definitively separates the novel from poetry, nor relies strictly on narrative structure. Mill argues that "to bring thoughts or images before the mind, for the purpose of acting upon the emotions, does not belong to poetry alone."¹⁴⁰ In other words, poetry essentially makes the reader stop and think about human nature, whereas prose allows the reader to bump along through everyday activity without having to think too much. Similarly for Barrett Browning, prose accounts for the plot and the entertainment, while poetry's job is a bit more

By issue and symbol, by significance
 And correspondence, to that spirit-world
 Outside the limits of our space and time
 Whereto we are bound. Let poets give it voice (5.120-125).

¹³⁹ Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 7.856-858

¹⁴⁰ Mill, *Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties* 93.

philosophical (though, unlike most philosophy, proceeds more “by analogy and subtle association than by uses of logic”).¹⁴¹ Mill further explains this when he argues that “the truth of poetry is to paint the human soul truly: the truth of fiction is to give a true picture of life.”¹⁴² Indeed, for Mill, poetry was a tool not only used to privilege more “refined” tastes, but also as a metaphor to justify nationalism and colonialism. While significantly less problematic, Barrett Browning also used generic framing to further political goals, both by anticipating *Aurora Leigh*’s reception and by carving out a space for female writers in nineteenth-century cultural production. Ultimately she was able to use her privileged and relatively well-respected position to fight for female and middle-class writers by suggesting that metaphysical insights existed beyond the normative modes of Victorian cultural production. Toying with the generic boundaries in *Aurora Leigh* ensured that genre was deployed with this ideological purpose. While nineteenth-century thinkers like Carlyle, Clough, Barrett Browning and Mill offer isolated examples of how Victorians thought about genre, they all belonged to the intellectual elite of their time; with a growing literate public and an exponentially increasing number of printed texts, it was a very small, respected, and highly educated group of people that functioned as cultural gatekeepers, ultimately determining that poetry involved a level of depth and revelation that plot-driven prose did not often reach. It was, essentially, the intellectuals who claimed poetry for the intellectual, while the novel remained on the periphery as consumable entertainment for the middle-class masses that occasionally reached levels of insight akin to the important poets of the day. Barrett Browning played with the binaries between economic and artistic value by publishing a text that deliberately occupied both spheres.

¹⁴¹ Browning, “Elizabeth Barrett and Richard Hengist Horne,” 399.

¹⁴² Mill, *Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties* 94.

Chapter 3

Genre Malleability in *Aurora Leigh*: Hierarchies of Value, Then and Now

Though both Elizabeth Barrett Browning's contemporaries and our own situate and recognize *Aurora Leigh* (1856) as speaking to critical vantages of genre, they do so in different ways: twentieth- and twenty-first-century definitions of the "novel" are vastly different from how Victorian authors and critics understood the genre.¹⁴³ That said, there still seems to be a desire to think about *Aurora Leigh*'s genre subversion, which makes it an especially fruitful text for interrogating how we think about genre, texts, and how literature gets assigned value--as well as for thinking about how Victorians grappled with these same issues. These genre questions are inherently tied to concerns about literary tastes: What precisely does it mean for a text to be valuable? How do things like class, gender, and secularization fit into that discussion? *Aurora Leigh* is useful for engaging with these questions because it deliberately combines the poem with the novel while devoting much of its content to thinking about the position of the reader and author: multiple elements of book culture are examined, from publishing and marketing standpoints to the metaphysical duties of the 'poet prophet.' Much of the critical literature produced on the text (from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) is firmly situated within this complex, transitional reading climate. The fact that *Aurora Leigh* occupies such plastic generic boundaries allows its readers to create a space for these important questions to be explored. Although twentieth- and twenty-first-century *Aurora Leigh* scholars examine the text from a completely different generic standpoint, they are still wrapped up in some of the very ideological tastes about literary value that exist amongst nineteenth-century critical responses.

¹⁴³ Later discussions of *Aurora Leigh* paratext aside, I will be using Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Margaret Reynolds, *Aurora Leigh: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism* (1856; New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

This chapter argues that just as twentieth- and twenty-first-century theorists attempt to use *Aurora Leigh*'s generic hybridity as a way to resist teleological readings of the history of the novel, they ultimately participate in those very same ideological and formal tastes. I begin by looking at and cataloguing how *Aurora Leigh* is picked up in twentieth- and twenty-first-century criticism, with a particular focus on the text's recovery and revival amongst second-wave feminists in the late twentieth century. In both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, critics position readings of *Aurora Leigh* as a text about genre and posit that the spaces between genres are what lead to fruitful discussions about gender, economy, and secularization. Further, despite a seeming desire to keep the text bound up in genre subversion, I argue that scholars emerging after second-wave feminism tend to value *Aurora Leigh* in terms of the text's novel-centered content, at the expense of the poetic. These more recent studies will be compared to Victorian reviews of *Aurora Leigh* and the paratext of earlier editions of the text that situate its literary prestige as conditional to its successes as a poem. While *Aurora Leigh*'s literary value was largely dependent for nineteenth-century readers upon which genre the text was classified under, the text's value today frequently requires that we think of *Aurora Leigh* as a text *about* genre and that the spaces between genres are what lead to complex and subversive arguments. Genre thus remains an integral marker of literary value and meaning for the text's readers, but it functions in fundamentally different (and often contrasting) ways throughout its afterlife.

It is this reversal in the hierarchy of depth that makes *Aurora Leigh* such a compelling generic case study--the very thing that brought the text's value down in the nineteenth century contributes to its academic reputation today. While twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics pick up on many of the issues that were of import to both Barrett Browning and her contemporaries, they do so in ways that don't always acknowledge the difference between how

Victorians thought about these issues and how we do. Ultimately I show that throughout the text's reception history, genre and literary tastes are filtered through gendered formations of power; tastes that experience a slight shift in focus during twentieth-century scholarly readings of Barrett Browning's text, but still develop a hermeneutics that values gendered genre logics and reflects ideological tastes. Dissecting the text's reception history and reading twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics against their Victorian counterparts will open up discussion about how genre gets deployed, by whom, and why.

Second-Wave Feminist Readings of *Aurora Leigh*

Contemporary scholars and students have second-wave feminists to thank for the resurfacing and popularizing of *Aurora Leigh*. A quick look through any academic search engine will reveal that until the 1970s, the text was not on the academy's radar. Though it is often taken for granted that *Aurora Leigh* has long been a pet text of Victorian feminist studies, I argue that the reintroduction of *Aurora Leigh* by feminist scholars is largely influenced by how critics have approached questions of gender and genre over the last sixty years. The heavy attention on *Aurora Leigh*'s generic boundaries can also be read as a resistance to mid-century critics like Northrop Frye, whose particular strand of genre-criticism tends to depoliticize aesthetic or formal qualities of a text.¹⁴⁴ However, for many scholars studying *Aurora Leigh*, the aesthetic and formal qualities of the text are necessarily political. Indeed, Meg Tasker points out that *Aurora Leigh*'s popularity as a feminist text stems from it being "an ambitious work by a woman poet, writing outside the accepted generic, stylistic and thematic conventions for Victorian women poets."¹⁴⁵ Barrett Browning's ambition is generally discussed in terms of the text's

¹⁴⁴ See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton UP, 1957).

¹⁴⁵ Meg Tasker, "Aurora Leigh: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Novel Approach to the woman Poet," in *Tradition and the Poetics of Self in Nineteenth-century Women's Poetry*, ed. Barbara Garlick (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) 24.

generic complexity. While Aurora's accomplishments and ideas certainly push social barriers, the text's subversiveness stems from its formal and gender experimentation and its complicated relationship with questions of genre. Considering the many cultural transitions Victorians underwent, this experimentation makes sense; in order to open up a conversation about transitional social issues and concerns, reforming generic conventions to generate a space for this seems a logical place to start.¹⁴⁶ Though Barrett Browning's text flirts with many genres, second-wave feminists embrace genre as a category for political critique by historicizing *Aurora Leigh*'s subversiveness as specifically existing between the conventionally "masculine" epic poem and "feminine" novel. At the same time, just as these scholars use *Aurora Leigh* to resist 'rise of the novel' arguments, they ultimately participate in similarly flawed teleological ideologies.

For many twentieth- and early twenty-first-century critics, part of the novel-poem's power exists precisely because it doesn't belong in any genre--it is the very inability to define *Aurora Leigh* that makes the text so valuable. Marjorie Stone argues that "part of the complexity of Barrett Browning's exploration of gender and the generic conventions of romance is that she unsettles and questions even her own generalizations."¹⁴⁷ The literary and the social correlate in such a way that Barrett Browning's resistance to a more conventional narrative structure becomes the crux of her subversive argument. Though Stone sets her argument up to be one of thinking about how gender and genre work in Barrett Browning's text, many of her readings require us to view the text as one that deliberately engages with the novel form. For instance,

¹⁴⁶ This genre play extends beyond only looking at the text as a novel or poem. See for instance, LaPorte, Charles, "Aurora Leigh, A Life-Drama, and Victorian Poetic Autobiography," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 53, no. 4 (2013) for insight into how Barrett Browning's work transcends into autobiography. That said, even here there is a focus on how Aurora Leigh plays with generic boundaries. See chapter 2 for more.

¹⁴⁷ Marjorie Stone, "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: 'The Princess' and 'Aurora Leigh,'" *Victorian Poetry* 25.2 (1987), 121.

Stone points out that the “fusion of genres entails a fusion of genders since Victorians viewed epic, philosophic, and racy satiric poetry as male domains, but the novel more suited to female writers.”¹⁴⁸ While Victorian male poets certainly were greater in number and perhaps held more prestige, it is clear from the tongue and cheek critique of this binary in *Aurora Leigh* that Barrett Browning was aware of the public perception that men created more valuable poetry, and that she was attempting to find a way to unbalance it. On the other hand, Stone argues that novels were more comfortably “female” because “novelists did not aspire to be priestly or prophetic figures interpreting God and the world to their fellows, and the novel was less subjective than the prevalent lyric and confessional poetic forms and therefore more congruent with the self-effacing role prescribed for Victorian women.”¹⁴⁹ Barrett Browning dismantles this binary by generating a novel-esque story that focuses on a young woman’s ambition to become a poet prophet writing metaphysically-minded verse. In other words, if we read *Aurora Leigh* as a novel, we will likely find it to be a powerfully subversive one because it picks up a “female” genre and infuses it with the very things that make poetics “masculine.” This gender dichotomy that *Aurora Leigh* challenges becomes very problematic if novelistic hermeneutics disappear and we read the text as simply a long poem. Evaluating *Aurora Leigh* as a complicated text *about* genre, is what allows critics to read into the gendered issues it presents and engages with.

This tendency for contemporary critics to situate *Aurora Leigh*’s feminist rebellion along the boundaries of the novel and poem is not an isolated or insignificant one. Like Stone, Susan Stanford Friedman, Deborah Byrd, Alison Case, Karne Hadley, Marisa Knox, Dorothy Mermin, Mary Mullen, Stefanie Markovits, Christine Chaney, and Herbert Tucker also situate Barrett

¹⁴⁸ Marjorie Stone, “Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: ‘The Princess’ and ‘Aurora Leigh,’” 115.

¹⁴⁹ Marjorie Stone, “Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: ‘The Princess’ and ‘Aurora Leigh,’” 115.

Browning's gender subversion within her combination of (or fluctuation between) traditionally masculine and feminine forms of writing and/or ways of thinking.¹⁵⁰ For Mermin, these forms are linked as part of "Barrett Browning's attempt to remake the structures she had inherited from male predecessors in order to create a space for herself."¹⁵¹ Byrd also echoes this point when she claims that "*Aurora Leigh* is certainly one of the most important long poems of the Victorian period...[it] demonstrates that the epic mode can accommodate the experiences, language, and viewpoint of women."¹⁵² These suggestions of Barrett Browning creating a space for feminine writing that didn't exist prior to *Aurora Leigh* is a common thread amongst twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics, and one that helps to justify the text's growing critical popularity. However, while Mermin and Byrd see Barrett Browning as developing a new feminine space by emerging from multiple genres, Chaney, Hadley, Knox, and Mullen (and, to an extent, Markovits) point to the novel-poem's ability to create that space by endlessly fluctuating

¹⁵⁰ See Susan S. Friedman, "Gender and Genre Anxiety: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H.D. as Epic poets," in *Aurora Leigh: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. ed Margaret Reynolds, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 444-72; Deborah Byrd, "Combating an Alien Tyranny: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Evolution As a Feminist Poet," in *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed Sandra Donaldson. (New York: G.K. Hall, 1999), 202-17; Alison Case, "Gender and Narration in "Aurora Leigh"" *Victorian Poetry* 29.1 (1991), 17-32; Karne Hadley, "'Tulips on Dunghills': Regendering the Georgic in Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Poetry* 52.3 (2014), 465-481; Marisa Knox, "Masculine Identification and Marital Dissolution in *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Poetry* 52.2 (2014), 277-301; Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1989) and "Genre and Gender in *Aurora Leigh*," *The Victorian Newsletter* 69 (1986), 7-11; Mary Mullen, "Two Clocks: 'Aurora Leigh', Poetic Form, and the Politics of Timeliness," *Victorian Poetry* 51.1 (2013), 63-80; Stefanie Markovits, *The Victorian Verse-Novel: Aspiring to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Christine Chaney, "The 'Prophet-Poet's Book,'" in *Victorian Hybridities: Cultural Anxiety and Formal Innovation*, ed. U. C. Knoepfelmacher and Logan D. Browning (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); and Herbert Tucker, "*Aurora Leigh*: Epic Solutions to Novel Ends," *Famous Last Words: Changes in Gender and Narrative Closure*, ed. Alison Booth (Charlottesville: U of Virginia, 1993);

¹⁵¹ Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry*, 8.

¹⁵² Byrd, "Combating an Alien Tyranny: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Evolution As a Feminist Poet," 212.

between existent genres--cannibalizing and reshaping them. This fluidity moves beyond larger generic boundaries and focuses on smaller conventions, from troubling generic senses of time (Mullen) to restructuring generic content (Hadley).

Aurora Leigh's flirtation with the novel has been read as a way to redirect the relationship between women writers and the Victorian novel, but also as a tool to overthrow and rewrite popular twentieth-century critical narratives about the novel. Tucker argues that it was not simply Barrett Browning's desire to create a space for herself that motivates this gendered writing convergence, but that it was mobilized as a "means for loosening the realist novel's grip on Victorian narrative as a shaper of women's lives."¹⁵³ Not only does Barrett Browning resist the novel as a genre, but also the twentieth-century narrative of the Victorian realist novel by structuring the plot through verse--a form that consistently reminds the reader of the text's structure and construction, and therefore inherently resists the formal verisimilitude associated with nineteenth-century realist tastes. *Aurora Leigh* becomes valuable to contemporary critics not only for its gender subversion, but for its ability to challenge or push back against critics like Nancy Armstrong (regarding domestic fiction) and Ian Watt (regarding the realist novel's "rise").¹⁵⁴ For Tucker, this is made possible through the masculine form, which he finds necessary to break patriarchal systems of power and create an "alternatively epic, Victorian-feminist program."¹⁵⁵ Though the novel is generally viewed by mid-twentieth-century critics,

¹⁵³ Tucker, "Aurora Leigh: Epic Solutions to Novel Ends," 62.

¹⁵⁴ See Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) and Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁵ Tucker, "Aurora Leigh: Epic Solutions to Novel Ends," 63.

Karen Hadley makes a similar argument when she discusses *Aurora*'s ability to work within the "masculine" georgic genre and reframe it through feminine content. Marisa Knox also argues that Barrett Browning must work within a male framework and "masculine identification" to resist the "limitations of the feminized novel form." See Hadley, "Tulips on Dunghills":

particularly Mikhail Bakhtin, as being malleable and porous, Tucker suggests that it was the form of the epic and myth in Victorian England that “allowed for more plasticity.”¹⁵⁶ The use of epic discourse and the “generic enlargement that myth made available...sped [Barrett Browning] past the conventions of realist mimesis into a utopian reclamation of the antique” that allows “Aurora and Romney [to] transcend the patterns novels trace.”¹⁵⁷ Where Stone finds *Aurora Leigh*’s subversive power to be in picking up the “feminine” novel and infusing it with “masculine” poetics, Tucker argues that the text picks up the “masculine” epic and feminizes it by “exploiting internal differences between its narrative and narrational, epic and poetic, register.”¹⁵⁸ For all of these critics, however, Barrett Browning’s power remains in her ability to navigate and confront the in between.

Barrett Browning’s generic fluidity functions as a tool to resist the Victorian realist narrative, while simultaneously highlighting genre-criticism’s ties to ideology. The power struggle between genders and genres is something Natasha Moore suggests works equally both ways and that the tension was something Barrett Browning was well aware and in control of:

Aurora Leigh’s deliberate feminization and domestication of the epic functions essentially as a novelization of the genre--and, conversely, as an epicizing of the Victorian domestic novel. The genius of Barrett Browning’s fusion of epic and novel conventions is in their overlap: the markers that signal allegiance to each genre have a tendency of signalling allegiance to both at once.¹⁵⁹

Regendering the Georgic in Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*” and Knox, “Masculine Identification and Marital Dissolution in *Aurora Leigh*,” 281.

¹⁵⁶ Tucker, “*Aurora Leigh*: Epic Solutions to Novel Ends,” 68.

¹⁵⁷ Herbert Tucker, *Epic: Britain’s Heroic Muse, 1790-1910* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 384.

¹⁵⁸ Tucker, “*Aurora Leigh*: Epic Solutions to Novel Ends,” 68.

¹⁵⁹ Natasha Moore, “Epic and Novel: The Encyclopedic Impulse in Victorian Poetry,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 68.3 (2013), 406.

Moore suggests that it is the “deliberate” resistance to convention within the text that interests literary critics, in part surely because suffusing Barrett Browning with conscious control over her generic hybridization inculcates her text with another intentional, feminist layer.¹⁶⁰ She points out how the merging of the epic and the novel works against a binary that many twentieth-century critics worked to create, in order to valorize and popularize the novel. It is therefore in the spaces between genres, where conventions are noticeably upset, that *Aurora Leigh* asks us to think about how we value literature. Similarly, Monique Morgan highlights the importance of these transitions and tensions as well, stating that when “the poem offsets the limits of one genre by the strengths of another...*Aurora Leigh* thus implies the necessity of the generic hybridity it embodies.”¹⁶¹ This intentional hybridity suggests that part of *Aurora Leigh*’s twentieth- and twenty-first-century prestige lies in the fact that it resists so many (formerly well-received) teleological arguments that attempt to lift the novel above other literary forms. Specifically, situating *Aurora Leigh*’s subversiveness within spaces between genres becomes a way to challenge history-of-the-novel powerhouses, such as Bakhtin and Watt, who famously privilege the realist novel over the epic poem.¹⁶² Ironically, contemporary critics use *Aurora Leigh*’s contentious relationship with the novel as a tool to critique contemporary hierarchies in which the novel is the dominant artform by aligning the text with conventions outlined in popular theories of the novel (the very theories that helped to lift the novel’s value and prestige).

Despite the importance of juggling between generic spaces of the text in order to resist these twentieth-century teleological arguments, the novelistic elements of *Aurora Leigh* still

¹⁶⁰ Moore, "Epic and Novel: The Encyclopedic Impulse in Victorian Poetry," 409.

¹⁶¹ Monique Morgan, *Narrative Means, Lyric Ends: Temporality in the Nineteenth-century British Long Poem* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), 121.

¹⁶² See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, tr. Michael Holquist (1975; Austin: U of Texas, 1981).

tend to be favored or discussed at the expense of the poetic, which suggests that this critical resistance is still aligned with twentieth-century history of the novel theorists. Stone, for example, frequently evaluates *Aurora Leigh*'s claims to poetry in terms of its novel-infused discourse. For instance, she points out that "Aurora's development from a young poet who writes 'old' to a mature poet forging her own forms and her own poetics closely parallels Barrett Browning's own progression from writing imitations of classical epic verse...to achieving success in minor verse forms...to attempting the novel-epic *Aurora Leigh*."¹⁶³ Though refraining from value discourse, this presents a clear teleological approach to how twentieth-century critics value interiority in the rise of the novel. Indeed, Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel* (1957) famously traces the novel's "rise" through its increasingly realist portrayal of psychological development--an argument which has largely been refuted for its teleological valuation, as well its neglect of other novels outside of the realist genre. Despite contemporary challenges to Watt, Stone's assessment of *Aurora* recuperates some of his rhetoric and approach. It is *Aurora* and Barrett Browning's growth that is recounted; *Aurora* learns to write more personal poetry, Barrett Browning makes the move from "a young woman who writes male to a mature poet who writes female."¹⁶⁴ Female, in this case being "novel," and more highly valued in this interpretation because in writing "feminine," Barrett Browning subverts the male-dominated poem.

Aurora and Barrett Browning are valued for their growth and their character development; a key trope in discussing the historical and cultural values of the realist novel, and one that is largely absent in discussing cultural values of the poem. While *Aurora* grows as a

¹⁶³ Marjorie Stone, "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: 'The Princess' and 'Aurora Leigh,'" 124.

¹⁶⁴ Marjorie Stone, "Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: 'The Princess' and 'Aurora Leigh,'" 124.

See Chapters 1 and 1.1 for more on how contemporary critics attempt to resist Watt's teleological arguments despite falling back on similarly problematic value systems.

poet, the actual poetic verse and discourse contained in the form of the text remains consistent. It is not the development of poetry that matters, but that poetry signifies the growth and maturity of Aurora as a character within a novel. As Stone points out, this parallels Bakhtin's argument that "parodic stylizations of canonized genres and styles occupy an essential place in the novel."¹⁶⁵ His definition of character development is structured "in a novel [when] the individual acquires the ideological and linguistic initiative necessary to change the nature of his own image."¹⁶⁶ However, according to Bakhtin, the novel is the only evolving genre capable of cannibalizing other generic forms, so from his standpoint, *Aurora Leigh* will always collapse into the category of "novel." For Stone, as for Bakhtin, it is not the poetic form in *Aurora Leigh* that represents these parodic stylizations or character depth--it is the framework of the novel. In other words, if we are to read *Aurora Leigh* as a subversive novel in terms of gender and genre, we must read the poetry through the generic lens of the novel. These attempts to subvert 'rise of the realist novel' theories ultimately collapse into the same arguments and problems as their predecessors.

Many twentieth-century critics put *Aurora Leigh* into conversation with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), further entrenching Barrett Browning's literary value in the discourse of the novel. Julia Bolton Holloway's comparison of Aurora's character development to that of Jane famously links the heroine to novel discourse, despite the fact that "Elizabeth Barrett Browning was not conscious of a borrowing from *Jane Eyre*...the reader senses the strong similarity to the two works. In both the women win. In both the men are rendered blind and helpless."¹⁶⁷ In this case, comparing the conventional novel marriage plot at the end of the texts

¹⁶⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 6.

¹⁶⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 38.

¹⁶⁷ Julia Bolton Holloway, "'Aurora Leigh' and 'Jane Eyre,'" *Bronte Society Transactions: The Journal of Bronte Studies* 17.2 (1977), 130.

leads to a feminist reading. Though the marriage-plot conclusion of *Aurora Leigh* has frequently been signaled as gender and genre normative for the Victorian novel, Holloway is not the only twentieth-century critic to argue otherwise. Alison Case points out that the “idea of marriage as the required telos of a young woman’s story” was one convention that could not successfully be ignored.¹⁶⁸ However, *Aurora Leigh*’s participation in both genres allows Aurora to achieve a “double teleology” that ends with a traditional marriage plot as both separate from and a means towards Aurora’s “artistic independence and success.” Ironically, the conventions of the novel must be simultaneously normative and subversive--in order for *Aurora Leigh* to be a “young woman’s story,” the marriage plot is required, but the focus on the poetic (or masculine ambition) helps to derail the slip into traditional feminine Victorian novels. It is important to note, however, that it is not the genre conventions of poetry that Case highlights here as rescuing *Aurora Leigh* from becoming a domestic novel; instead, it is the thematic and plot driven focus on Aurora’s profession as a poet. Oddly, both *Aurora Leigh* and *Jane Eyre* get pigeonholed into the ‘realist’ novel while simultaneously resisting the genre in complex ways.¹⁶⁹

Although the two ‘novels’ share many similarities, it is important to keep in mind that they are also quite different. In comparing *Aurora Leigh* to *Jane Eyre* more frequently, contemporary critics increasingly ask us to look at the domestic-novel plot as the same, even though *Aurora Leigh* is a verse poem and mindfully focuses on Aurora developing her life and ideas as a poet; not on her role as a conventional female in a romance. Indeed, twentieth-century critics do the two female authors a disservice by collapsing similar plot points into identical arguments. Just because Mr. Rochester's blindness symbolizes that Jane has attained enough

¹⁶⁸ Case, "Gender and Narration in "Aurora Leigh,"" 30.

¹⁶⁹ For instance, like Barrett Browning, Charlotte Brontë also resisted the everyday realism found in Jane Austen’s novels. For more on this, see Chapter Two.

independence to come back to him, it does not mean that Aurora ends up with Romney for the same reason--but because she succeeded in her life goals as a poet and has earned his respect and appreciation as a poetess. In some ways, the similarities between the two texts are more enriching in the ways that they resist the verisimilitude frequently associated with the realist novel. Where Barrett Browning uses verse to write dialogue, reminding readers constantly of the labor that goes into writing, Brontë flirts with gothic descriptions and spiritual interventions--neither reaches a conclusion that feels altogether real for nineteenth-century woman. I do not suggest, however, that comparisons between the two authors are entirely unique to twentieth-century scholars. Peter Bayne famously compares the two authors in *Two Great Englishwomen, Mrs. Browning & Charlotte Brontë: With an Essay on Poetry, Illustrated from Wordsworth, Burns, and Byron* (1881). Not for nothing does Bayne's comparison sit alongside an "essay on poetry," nor should it be lost that his chapters on Barrett Browning are framed with titles including "Her Earliest Verses," "A Vision of Poets and The Poet's Vow," and "Her Philanthropic Poetry," nor that he opens his chapter on *Aurora Leigh* by calling it "the most extensive of all Mrs. Browning's poems."¹⁷⁰ Despite Barrett Browning's staunch claims that she had not read *Jane Eyre*, many nineteenth-century readers were already putting the two texts together; unlike it does for twentieth-century scholars, that comparison can coexist with reading *Aurora Leigh* as a poem and not a novel.

Many twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics presume to focus on the spaces in between genres that *Aurora Leigh* speaks to, but the formal elements of the poem are rarely part

¹⁷⁰ Peter Bayne, *Mrs Browning & Charlotte Bronte; With an Essay on Poetry, Illustrated from Wordsworth, Burns, and Byron* (London: J. Clarke, 1881), 107. It is important to point out that while the selections on Barrett Browning and Brontë initially appeared elsewhere, they were extended, revised, and did not appear together until this edition was released with an essay on poetry.

of that discussion and, if they are, they take a backseat to discussions of plot and Aurora's growth as a poet. Even Tucker, who frequently looks at the formative structures of the text as an epic, ultimately merges his readings with hermeneutics of the novel. He does this primarily when grounding Aurora's position as a poet prophet: "At the level of epic theodicy, Barrett Browning vacillates between the patriarchal Christianity that ruled her father's house and an alternative theology grounded in the feminine, the bodily, the unspoken but vividly felt."¹⁷¹ However, in order for Aurora to be a divine authority, he points out that she must first assert her independence and autonomy (signalling a shift in narrative structure, through which Aurora establishes personhood in more conventionally 'novel' terms). In this sense, *Aurora Leigh* must move through the Kunstlerroman narrative in order to fully accomplish the feminine, prophetic authority.¹⁷² Only when Aurora has developed as a narrative character can she develop as a poet—her character depth is rooted in reading the text structurally through the lens of the novel.

While Tucker traces Barrett Browning's narration as leading into a teleological, "apocalyptic myth" in which Aurora and Romney obtain prophetic status beyond the novel, this narrative balance is not always seen with so much stability.¹⁷³ For example, Gail Turley Houston also argues that Barrett Browning's gender subversion is largely situated in her genre subversion, but she suggests that gender, genre, and spiritual authority are bound up in the text's reflexive discussion of the market. *Aurora Leigh* operates as a space for these interpretive lenses to converge because the text "represent[s] the material conditions of writing and the construction

¹⁷¹ Tucker, "*Aurora Leigh*: Epic Solutions to Novel Ends," 72.

¹⁷² See Karen Dieleman, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Religious Poetics: Congregationalist Models of Hymnist and Preacher," *Victorian Poetry* 45.2 (2007), 135-57. Dieleman traces Barrett Browning's complex relationship with spirituality, poetic prophecy, gender, and religious leaders and ultimately argues that Barrett Browning's understanding of the "poet prophet" was filled with more tension than is generally brought to critical attention.

¹⁷³ Tucker, *Epic: Britain's Heroic Muse, 1790-1910*, 386.

of gender,” which is embedded in Barrett Browning’s popularity and “novelistic renditio[n] of [her] own rise to fame.”¹⁷⁴ Houston situates Barrett Browning’s gender subversion within her genre subversion in that *Aurora Leigh* “aggressively depicts, analyzes, and refutes the Victorian idea that women writers were just poor imitators of great male authors.”¹⁷⁵ Despite Aurora’s acceptance of Romney’s proposal at the end of the text, Houston claims that the “wrestling with and never escaping the stifling Victorian impositions of gender...Barrett Browning’s experiment with androgyny...brilliantly portray[s] the anxiety inherent in ‘gendered bodies.’”¹⁷⁶ Alison Case makes a similar argument when she points out that the “juggling of narrative modes does not so much reconcile these conflicting roles and impulses as allow them an uneasy coexistence.”¹⁷⁷ In other words, the genre experimentation in *Aurora Leigh* becomes reinvigorated by the fact that it never stabilizes or obtains closure. Both Houston and Case suggest that *Aurora Leigh* subverts genre by infusing both female and male writing, however this subversion never concludes, but lapses into an infinite loop.

This complex loop is problematized by Barrett Browning’s treatment of literary value, material and aesthetic. For Houston, again, this is bound up in the unsolved, as “Barrett Browning often overrides the binary nature of such metaphors through her sheer determination to blur the mantles of prophet and prostitute and thereby suggest an ongoing interplay of the conditions of the material and mental involved in the construction of the artist and self.”¹⁷⁸ In

¹⁷⁴ Gail Turley Houston, "Gender Construction and the Kunstlerroman: *David Copperfield* and *Aurora Leigh*," *Philological Quarterly* 72 (1993), 214.

¹⁷⁵ Houston, "Gender Construction and the Kunstlerroman: *David Copperfield* and *Aurora Leigh*," 223.

¹⁷⁶ Houston, "Gender Construction and the Kunstlerroman: *David Copperfield* and *Aurora Leigh*," 224.

¹⁷⁷ Case, "Gender and Narration in "Aurora Leigh,"" 18.

¹⁷⁸ Houston, "Gender Construction and the Kunstlerroman: *David Copperfield* and *Aurora Leigh*," 227.

this case, the book as a commodity becomes gendered to represent a writer selling herself for money, as “Aurora must prostitute her writing in order to eat.”¹⁷⁹ Indeed, Barrett Browning provides many instances in which the reader is confronted with Aurora’s sense of the distance between poetry and profit, highlighting the contentious relationship between literature and the marketplace. While novel sales were growing, poetry sales were not, which frequently shaped and validated the argument that “real” art was appreciated by fewer individuals, and thus was not invested in profit in the same way novels and sensation fiction were. With the perceived disappearance of the ‘Romance Author,’ for Victorian poets especially, sales were seen as an inverse marker of value, a notion that Barrett Browning and Aurora paradoxically maintain and problematize. It is perhaps for this reason that Aurora must spend her days churning out prose she cares little for, claiming that she “had to live that therefore [she] might work... to work with one hand for the booksellers / while working with the other for [her]self.”¹⁸⁰

Ironically, while Aurora (and Barrett Browning) valued aesthetic poetry as ‘art,’ and understood other genres as a medium through which to obtain the freedom to express that art, twentieth-century critics tend to impose the reverse by focusing on the verse merely as a vehicle that delivers the narrative qualities of Aurora’s success as a poet, rather than on the formal qualities which enforced Barrett Browning’s position as a poetess capable of tricking the novel’s readers into appreciating the value of the poetic form. In an attempt to displace the book’s value as a commodity, while maintaining that poet prophets deserve to be shared and bought, Barrett Browning critiques the popularity of the novel (pure commodity) all the while participating in it. This is a moment in which Barrett Browning once again rejects genre conventions by stacking

¹⁷⁹ Houston, "Gender Construction and the Kunstlerroman: *David Copperfield* and *Aurora Leigh*," 229.

¹⁸⁰ Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 3. 301-304.

them up against each other: rather than choosing the market or “truth,” she asks for both, by suggesting that the latter should create the former. Houston focuses on the intersection of genre with gender and the market, but like the other critics, she situates *Aurora Leigh*’s subversiveness in the text’s experimentation with genre.

While many of these twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics find *Aurora Leigh*’s subversion and importance to be situated within the spaces between genres, they simultaneously appear to value what would be called “novel” qualities in the Victorian period--or they at least privilege conventions historically associated and valued in the novel. For instance, none of these critics examine the text’s poetics on its own terms, but focus on its novelistic hermeneutics instead. The richness that they highlight in *Aurora Leigh* is all threaded through discussion of plot and character development; it is the storyline of the developing “poet” that is valued, not necessarily the poetry itself. The mixing of genres merely allows for these conversations about gender, commodity, and literary value to take place. Though these readings differ in the details, amongst them, genre is consistently deployed and structured around popular theoretical ideology. Ultimately, this suggests that *Aurora Leigh*’s resurgence as a popular Victorian text is deeply connected not merely to aesthetic tastes or values, but that our own literary tastes and values are embedded in complex and changing formations of power and popularity.

Nineteenth-century Readings of *Aurora Leigh*

Late twentieth-century fascinations with reading *Aurora Leigh* through the hermeneutics of the novel are particularly compelling considering that Barrett Browning herself positioned the poetry of *Aurora Leigh* above the novel-influenced plot--encouraging her readers to classify her work undoubtedly as poetry first and foremost. Aurora goes so far as to claim that poets are “Of the only truth-tellers now left to God,” despite the fact that her character follows the plot of a

conventional Victorian domestic novel.¹⁸¹ For many Victorian intellectuals, poetic value was determined by the poem's ability to speak truths (historically relevant or timeless) while providing small moments of clarity and prophecy. The plot of the text was quite likely little more than filler for Barrett Browning--a way to obtain a larger readership and challenge the way we interact with and value the texts we consume. Novels were viewed as entertainment, while poetry, history, and philosophy were perceived as the predominant containers of literary depth.

Today, however, critics studying *Aurora Leigh* tend to privilege the plot as a central feature of the text, perhaps *the* central feature (even the aforementioned critics who engage with the text as "poetry" interpret it through its narrative structure). Nancy Armstrong famously links the history of the novel with subjectivity, making interiority something that is both created and recreated through a specific genre. Novels provide a "tangible form to a desire," with which to dislodge from "an assigned position."¹⁸² Armstrong argues that Victorian authors unsuccessfully retreated from this:

Victorian novels make the turn against expressive individualism a mandatory component of the subject's growth and development. To create an individual, however, still requires the novel to offer an interiority in excess of the social position that individual is supposed to occupy...individuality depends on how he or she chooses to displace what is a fundamentally asocial desire onto a socially appropriate object.

Aurora fits nicely into this reading: She is a female who, like Barrett Browning, rejects the position of the marginalized female poet, and rejects the misogynistic critique bestowed by

¹⁸¹ Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1. 859.

¹⁸² Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005), 8.

Romney early on in the text when he claims that “We get no Christ from [women] - and verily/ We shall not get a poet.”¹⁸³ Aurora, however, successfully subverts these claims to become a self-proclaimed “better” poet. This allows her to obtain the interiority Armstrong situates as something completely interdependent on the novel. According to Armstrong’s reading of the individual, poetry could not create this interiority, this subject, before the creation of the novel and, subsequently, poetry’s cannibalization of this interiority transforms it into a novel.¹⁸⁴ It is this theoretical lineage, perhaps, that twentieth-century *Aurora Leigh* scholars emerge from and speak to, whether intentionally or not, when they read Aurora’s poetic growth (and Barrett Browning’s generic subversion) through this ideologically-complex theoretical history in which hermeneutics of the novel are privileged above those of the poem.

Not unlike contemporary Barrett Browning scholars, Victorians also used genre to structure and evaluate literary taste and value; and while *Aurora Leigh* proved a complicated text to nail down, then as now, the majority of Victorian reviews evaluate the text in terms of one genre or the other, with little value placed on generic transgressions. An anxiety over the power and superficiality of the novel, as well as over the abilities of women writers is something that shows up in most of the nineteenth-century reviews of *Aurora Leigh*.¹⁸⁵ Though the tensions between genres in the text are sites of value and intrigue today, they were viewed with more trepidation and disdain immediately following the publication of the text. Almost all of the positive reviews favor *Aurora Leigh* in terms of its poetic strengths, with very few valuing the plot or novel-driven elements. Several reviewers compare Barrett Browning to Tennyson, remarking that “Mrs. Browning is entitled to dispute with Tennyson the honor of being the

¹⁸³ Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, 1. 24-25.

¹⁸⁴ Armstrong pulls from Bakhtin’s binary between poetry and the novel here.

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter One for more on nineteenth-century anxieties and the novel.

greatest living poet of England” (*Boston Daily*)¹⁸⁶, and that *Aurora Leigh* is “a picture, as perfect in force of outline and in richness of colouring as anything in Tennyson” (*Literary Gazette*).¹⁸⁷ This alignment with Tennyson asks the reader to think of *Aurora Leigh* as a long poem, inherently drawing connections to *In Memoriam* (1850), while suggesting that the text’s “richness” is achieved insofar as the text is a poem. This favoring of the poetic elements is highlighted when multiple reviewers point out that Barrett Browning is the “greatest female poet of [their] own age” and that *Aurora Leigh* is “her greatest poem” (*Dublin University Magazine*),¹⁸⁸ in which “the influence of the poem sinks deep into your mind, making you feel stronger and better” (*Saturday Analyst and Leader*).¹⁸⁹ And, unsurprisingly, almost all of these reviews conclude with the condescending praise that *Aurora Leigh* is an impressive poem for a woman (*Edinburgh Weekly Review*).¹⁹⁰ While contemporary *Aurora Leigh* scholars mark the text’s genre fluidity as a site of gender subversion, Victorians used the categories of novel and poem to place the text within hegemonic gender norms. The novelistic elements of the text, commonly associated with feminine readers and writers, were condemned, while the poetic were praised.

Most positive reviews of *Aurora Leigh* place its value in relation to its pedagogical and spiritual guidance--Barrett Browning’s prophetic authority. One reviewer remarks that:

In no poem of our time, indeed, is this God-given quality of inspiration more conspicuous than the present. It is there as surely as in the Hebrew prophets, in the grandest periods of Milton or Jeremy Taylor,--that something greater than

¹⁸⁶ See "Aurora Leigh Review," *Boston Daily Advertiser* (10 Dec. 1856).

¹⁸⁷ *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Archaeology, Science, and Art* (22 Nov. 1856) 917-18.

¹⁸⁸ *The Dublin University Magazine*, XLIX (1857), 460-70.

¹⁸⁹ *The Saturday Analyst and Leader* (6 Dec. 1856) 1169-170.

¹⁹⁰ C. H. Aide, *Edinburgh Weekly Review* (28 Feb. 1857) 7-9.

prophet or poet or preacher,--that voice which speaks like a revelation from:
 heaven, that ‘utterance of the gods’ which is the attribute of the greatest poets. We
 feel it vibrate along the nerves.¹⁹¹

The direct connection to the text’s prophetic power immediately aligns *Aurora Leigh* with qualities that were popularly recognized as purely poetic or literary--not of the novel. Indeed, these are the very goals Aurora herself outlines for her reader and poetry. It is the metaphysical rigour of the poem that gives the text depth, as it is “no poem to be taken up for pastime...the unthoughtful and the very young will, in all likelihood, turn away from it disappointed.”¹⁹² Interestingly, it seems to be the very fact that the book is not “poetry made easy” (*National Magazine*)¹⁹³ that makes it “a poem with so much genuine depth” (*British Quarterly*).¹⁹⁴ This can be read as a way for reviewers to not only separate good genres from bad, but to also the ‘correct’ kind of reader from the ‘wrong’ one, speaking to intersectional binaries of Victorian reading culture where ease is set up against depth. The nineteenth-century tendency to structure textual richness or depth around difficulty was a common reaction against the growing lower- and middle-class readerships. Only the select few willing and capable of making it through the struggle were the worthy readers in a system capable of policing both reader and text. Again, this functions as another example of Pierre Bourdieu’s game of “loser wins.”¹⁹⁵ This rejection of “easy” reading worked not only do devalue the lower classes, but also to reject the absorptive reading practices of the growing novel culture.

One nineteenth-century reviewer, however, condemns this cultural practice of privileging

¹⁹¹ *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Archaeology, Science, and Art.*

¹⁹² *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Archaeology, Science, and Art.*

¹⁹³ *The National Magazine* (Mar. 1857), 314-15.

¹⁹⁴ R. A. Vaughan, *British Quarterly Review*, 25th ed. (Jan. 1857), 263-67.

¹⁹⁵ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

literary selectiveness, claiming that *Aurora Leigh* is “not a poem for the many but for the few, and this to some extent we must call a fault, and a serious one” and that “we cannot but feel that the same subject might have been treated so as to impress a far wider circle without sacrifice of a single lineament of delicacy or truth. The thinkers of our age are too much infected with the disease of introspection and Mrs. Browning is one of the sick whom we want a Bethesda Pool to heal” (*Atlas*).¹⁹⁶ This review is particularly compelling in that it references the Gospel of John and the “lecherous”--ironic given Barrett Browning’s infusion of religion and poetry and that introspection would be viewed as lecherous. It is important to note, however, that these flaws are highlighted as novelistic ones: the reviewer argues that it is the unrealistic plot and character-driven introspection that take away from the power of the poetry, while suggesting that the real problem stems from the fact that too many people were reading novels rather than poems. These novel conventions are suggested as interfering with the text’s ability to engage a wider audience with the prophetic qualities of the poem. In order to get the best ‘good’ from *Aurora Leigh*, in other words, one would have to appreciate it as a poem, not as a novel. Many critics found frustration in the fact that Barrett Browning used the frivolity of the novel to disguise the poetry, claiming that Barrett Browning, more than most poets of the time, had “no need of resorting to fantasies for the sake of attracting an audience” (*Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*).¹⁹⁷ Just as twentieth-century critics find value in the ways Barrett Browning uses genre in complex ways, rather in the text of *Aurora Leigh* itself, nineteenth-century critics seem to find Barrett Browning’s use of the novel as a means to an audience, not an achievement of art in its own right.

With the exception of a review in the *Globe* (which alone seems interested in valuing

¹⁹⁶ “Literature Reviews of New Books,” *The Atlas* (13 Dec. 1856).

¹⁹⁷ W. E. Aytoun, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 81st ed. (Jan. 1857), 23-41.

both the novel and poetic elements), nineteenth-century reviews overwhelmingly condemn the novel-based conventions found in *Aurora Leigh*.¹⁹⁸ Perhaps the most famous instance of this comes from George Eliot, who criticizes the novelistic elements of the text when she points out that the plot:

has no other merit than that of offering certain elements of life, and certain situations which are peculiarly fitted to call for the writer's rich thought and experience. It has nothing either fresh or felicitous in structure or incident; and we are especially sorry that Mrs. Browning has added one more to the imitations of the catastrophe in "Jane Eyre," by smiting her hero with blindness before he is made happy in the love of Aurora.¹⁹⁹

Despite Eliot's proclamation that the "poem" lacks plot-based originality (going so far as to call it an imitation), she still applies some value to the text when she claims it is Barrett Browning's "longest and greatest poem" and that she has "shown herself all the greater poet because she is intensely a poetess" (Eliot 407). This sentiment is also found in the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, when the reviewer points out that "after eliminating the story, the eccentricities of the actors, and a great part of the dialogue, there will remain an abundant store of poetical thought, of musical language, and of deep and true reflection."²⁰⁰ Like Eliot, this reviewer suggests that though the plot is ineffective, the poetry is still strong. While Eliot's critiques mirror many of Barrett Browning's contemporaries, they remain particularly poignant given that Eliot would herself elevate the status of the novel amongst Victorian readers.

¹⁹⁸ *The Globe and Traveller* 1821 11th ed. (20 Nov. 1856).

¹⁹⁹ George Eliot, "From Westminster Review," *Aurora Leigh: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Margaret Reynolds (New York: W.W.Norton, 1996), 407.

²⁰⁰ G. S. Venables, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, 61st ed. (27 Dec. 1856), 776-78.

This disdain for the plot-driven elements of *Aurora Leigh* is carried through in almost every review of the text. Part of this critique comes from the unoriginality of the plot, claiming that it uses “old trick, well worn in novels and plays” (*Athenaeum*),²⁰¹ that “the growth of characters, [are] all of them out of the common way” (*Atlas*);²⁰² “the story, which has very little merit” (*Edinburgh Weekly Review*)²⁰³ “reads like a translation into blank verse of a French novel” (*The Tablet*).²⁰⁴ In this last example, the reviewer not only criticizes the plot of *Aurora Leigh*, but aligns it with a genre (the French novel) that, in Victorian England, was as far from English perceptions of nationalism, “art,” “depth,” or “literature” as a text could get. This disdain is echoed in other critiques which claim that if we consider the text as prose, “it is as poor and faulty a specimen as ever was presented to our notice. It would not pass muster even in a third-rate novel” (*Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*).²⁰⁵ *The Saturday Analyst and Leader* is slightly more generous in this hierarchy, claiming that “as a novel, [*Aurora Leigh*] is but second-rate...and were *Aurora Leigh* written in prose, or in verse less affluent, and musical, and tender, we should throw it aside with no more commendation than is bestowed on second-rate novels.”²⁰⁶

The novel-esque elements are viewed merely as a vehicle to carry Barrett Browning’s poetic reasonings at best: “the middle is an impossible novel, contrived to carry Aurora and Romney through all the experiences and disappointments of modern theories, in order, by a process of exhaustion, to bring them to acknowledge at last the required truth” (the *Rambler*).²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ H. F. Chorley, *The Athenaeum* [London], 1517th ed. (22 Nov. 1856), 1425-427.

²⁰² “Literature Reviews of New Books,” *The Atlas*.

²⁰³ C. H. Aide, *Edinburgh Weekly Review*, 7-9.

²⁰⁴ *Tablet* [Dublin] (29 Nov. 1856), 762-63.

²⁰⁵ Aytoun, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*.

²⁰⁶ *The Saturday Analyst and Leader*, 1169-170.

²⁰⁷ “Short Notices,” *The Rambler* (Feb. 1857), 152-54.

These reviews suggest that the plot brings down the quality of the work, or at the very least impedes the reader from experiencing the value of the poetry. However in their comparisons between the novelistic and poetic elements of the text, they ultimately argue that the poor design of the former helps to highlight the prestige of the text's successes in the latter while also pointing out that the only real use for the plot-based elements is to allow the reader to plunge into the poetic "truths." While there is general consensus that the poetry is valuable, "the reader can never think to himself--'All this would have been better said in prose'" (*British Quarterly Review*).²⁰⁸ The novel elements of the text serve the larger purpose, then, of solidifying poetry's greater richness and value. The harsh reviews of the novel elements throughout these reviews seem to suggest that even within prose hierarchies, *Aurora Leigh* achieves little of value--perhaps because of the stark contrast these reviewers use to highlight the success of the poetry or perhaps, as Eliot suggests, because the plot is derivative and familiar. Especially significant is the fact that the more subversive feminist moments are not actually so familiar (Aurora becoming a poet and forgoing the domestic space to go work both economically and for her art). Perhaps the Victorians ignored these more subversive elements and focused instead on the derivative domestic novel plot points; though *Aurora Leigh* is certainly more than a conventional mid-century domestic novel.

While many of these critics were willing to shrug off the subpar novel contained within *Aurora Leigh* in order to value the poetry, several would not. One critic claims that "no admirer of Mrs. Browning's genius ought in prudence to defend," for she "has willfully alternated passages of sorry prose with bursts of splendid poetry; and her prose is all the worse because she has been compelled to dislocate its joints in order to make it read like blank verse" (*Tablet*).²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Vaughan, *British Quarterly Review*.

²⁰⁹ *Tablet*, 762-63.

Because Barrett Browning tainted her “poetical beauties” with the “deep disappointment and repugnance” of the “inexcusable” story, she has “aggravate[d], instead of...lessen[ed], the offence” (*Tablet*). Interestingly, the poetic verses seem to be the “true” nature of the text--the added prose and plot “dislocat[ing]” and tarnishing it into something disfigured and alien. In other words, the plot of *Aurora Leigh* has brought the poetry down to such a level that no value could be found in it. The “splendid failure in an impossible attempt” (*Edinburgh Review*)²¹⁰ left the poem “want[ing] in some of the graces of art” (*National Magazine*),²¹¹ as Barrett Browning “hardly comes up to her own estimate of true poet”. Regardless, most nineteenth-century reviewers fail to find value in *Aurora Leigh*’s occupation of multiple genres--the use of prose is a means to an end at best or literary corruption at worst.

The shifting critical discourse surrounding Barrett Browning’s text is reflected in the paratext of various editions of *Aurora Leigh* through the years.²¹² Like contemporary critics, recent editions of *Aurora Leigh* tend to situate the text deliberately within the tensions of genre, rejecting the opportunity to frame the book as either novel or poem in the paratext. The currently most popular critical paperback edition, edited by Margaret Reynolds (1996), includes a selection of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticism that links *Aurora Leigh* and Barrett Browning to important questions about genre and gender (with suggestions that the two are deeply connected). This extensive paratext, geared primarily towards scholars, is contextualized by an introduction that examines how the text earned interest from feminist scholars, while connecting that interest to larger discussions of genre and *Aurora Leigh*’s generic subversion. Indeed, the poem-novel itself is titled *The Text of Aurora Leigh*--something which strongly

²¹⁰ W. Strigand, *Edinburgh Review*, 114th ed. (Oct. 1861), 513-34.

²¹¹ *The National Magazine*, 314-15.

²¹² My discussion on paratext is indebted to Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997).

contrasts the 1883 Thomas Y. Crowell & Co. edition, entitled *Aurora Leigh: A Poem in Nine Books*.²¹³ This stark difference demonstrates an important change in *Aurora Leigh*'s reception. The 1883 edition clearly situates the text within the literary prestige of poetry, potentially also focusing the text away from the popular criticism of the novel-elements in the text at the time--*Aurora Leigh* is structured, first and foremost, as "a poem." However, the contemporary Norton edition's use of the word "text" immediately calls attention to the generic contention Barrett Browning's work is situated within, as well as critical deconstructive tastes from the late twentieth-century.

In fact, the word "poem" is dropped from most contemporary editions of *Aurora Leigh*, with the exception of the Penguin Classics edition, *Aurora Leigh And Other Poems*, which serves as a collection of Barrett Browning's most popular works.²¹⁴ The rhetoric in this edition argues that the 1856 text should be considered alongside her "other" poems, which initially seems to suggest that Penguin encourages its readers to think of *Aurora Leigh* itself as a poem. However, the back blurb specifies that *Aurora Leigh* is an "epic novel in blank verse," which contains, in addition "poetry from several volumes." The unusual categorization of "epic novel" with the formal structure of "blank verse" instantly asks the reader to become situated within the generic tensions of the work. Indeed, the earliest editions of *Aurora Leigh* disregard or mask this tension altogether--the only notable paratext being Barrett Browning's dedication to John Kenyon, in which she refers to the text as a "poem...into which [her] highest convictions upon Life and Art

²¹³ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh; a Poem in Nine Books* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1883).

²¹⁴ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, John Robert Glorney. Bolton, and Julia Bolton Holloway. *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* (London: Penguin, 1995).

have entered.”²¹⁵ That these early editions seem to beg the reader to focus on poetry while reading *Aurora Leigh* is clear, as is the fact that contemporary editions seem to ask for a reading between genres.

Nineteenth-century Novel Anxieties

Just as twentieth- and twenty-first-century critical tastes frame how contemporary scholars have engaged and continue to engage with *Aurora Leigh*'s generic ambiguity, it is equally necessary to think about how nineteenth-century reception of the text was framed by anxieties surrounding the growing popularity of the novel. While nineteenth-century intellectuals and poets attempted to respond to this growing popularity, many Victorians worried about the pedagogical effects the novel as a genre had on its readers.²¹⁶ This resistance to the novel largely framed how Victorians spoke about literary value and depth. It is no surprise then that the vast majority of Victorian reviewers found room to praise Barrett Browning's poetry (the genre deemed worthy of respect and, as twentieth-century *Aurora Leigh* scholars note, “masculinity”), while remaining underwhelmed by her attempt to enshroud her verse within the far-less valued or understood narrative conventions of the novel; particularly since the novel was largely associated with shallowness, ease, absorption, and women--the very antithesis of poetic aesthetic.

As I discuss in Chapter One, novel reading was often deemed dangerous and corrupting. William Rathbone Greg argued that it was “effective by reason of its very lightness: it spreads, penetrates, and permeates, where weightier matter would lie merely on the outside of the mind.”²¹⁷ This sentiment echoes nineteenth-century reviews which praised *Aurora Leigh* for not

²¹⁵ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1857).

²¹⁶ See Chapter One for more on Victorian anxieties surrounding the novel.

²¹⁷ William Rathbone Greg, “False Morality of Lady Novelists,” in *National Review* (1859), 144. This article is also discussed in some depth in Chapter One.

becoming “poetry made easy,” (*National Magazine*),²¹⁸ despite masquerading, in part, as a novel. In many ways, the text was able to perform as a poem first and novel second because it did not succumb entirely to the absorptive and dangerous practices of the novel--Barrett Browning adopted the respectable conventions of the poem while abandoning the feared conventions of the novel.

In addition to outlining the shallowness of the novel, Victorians frequently discussed the genre as if it were an infection or disease slowly making its way through Europe: though “their effects are less immediate and less direct; they work deeper, but they work slower; they work upon the few first, and afterwards through these upon the many’ they affect the present age probably much less, but future ages infinitely more.”²¹⁹ The “lightness” of the novel interacts with the brain when it is “comparatively passive,” making the effects of the text more capable of permeating the readers’ minds “like soup or jelly...rapidly absorbed into the system.” These novels, more importantly, influence very specific minds and

constitute a principal part of the reading of women, who are always impressionable, in whom at all times the emotional element is more awake and more powerful than the critical, whose feelings are more easily aroused and

²¹⁸ *The National Magazine*, 314-15.

²¹⁹ See Greg, “False Morality of Lady Novelists,” 145. Greg not only defines the genre through gender, but through generation as well. The article describes the genre as “not only the favourite reading of the young; it is also the line in which young writers most incline to try their powers...[because] they are easier, they require less sustained effort, and they are incomparably more certain of an audience” (147). In a word, the novel functions as a writable text, with a porous message, that will be very likely to sell and garner an audience. The “ease” of writing and reading the novel suggests that the genre was not valued as one containing difficult depth (difficulty and slowness in reading being key markers of depth for Victorians). Part of the critique stems from frustration over a focus on character and empiricism, at the expense of “principles which may be learned a priori” (148). These learned principles are at the bottom of the Victorian critique--that novels are concerned with irrelevant issues and have the power to push “souls trembling and hesitating on the verge of good and evil” towards one or the other, providing novels with a power that was generally saved for religious texts (146).

whose estimates are more easily influenced than ours.

The anxiety over the novels stems not only from their lower status, but from the fact that they had the ability to teach and interact with women. This very separation between the emotional and the philosophical consistently shows up in Victorian delineations of gender and genre (a discourse that is picked up and problematized by many twentieth-century critics). *Aurora Leigh* is situated right in the middle of this dichotomy--not only between poem and novel, but between story and philosophical thought. Considering the deep connection between genre and ideology, it is really no wonder why Victorians had just as much difficulty attributing value and categorization to Barrett Browning's text as contemporary scholars do, nor is it hard to determine why such high stakes were ascribed to a categorization that might seem so trivial in passing.

Aurora Leigh encapsulates some of the complex ways Victorians thought about genre, depth, and taste, as literary values and culture experienced a radical transformation. By situating the genre as "never deep" and "superficial," it becomes clear how the novel was positioned as something below or inferior to poetry.²²⁰ This discourse also begins to frame genre discussion in questions of depth and insight. Of course, as twentieth-century approaches to *Aurora Leigh* and genre demonstrate, these definitions and values get redefined and restructured continuously as the novel gains more prestige. In tracing back the long and complicated reception history of *Aurora Leigh*, it is clear that not only do the generic boundaries constraining the text change, but so do the very things that define 'depth' and artistic prestige--all while the text itself remains the same (so to speak). In this way, *Aurora Leigh* functions as an especially fruitful text and case study that explores and demonstrates how literary values are created, enforced, and transformed by ideological tastes and cultural formations of power.

²²⁰ Greg, "False Morality of Lady Novelists," 149.

Chapter 4

Austen's Malleability: Fans, Adaptations, and Value Production

Critics such as Marilyn Butler and Aileen Douglas define a culture of “Austen-ian exceptionalism” as one that establishes hierarchies of literary value by isolating Austen from her contemporaries. Douglas has placed particular focus on how “critics have frequently chosen to analyze her work through images of containment and enclosure,” placing her “in a serene enclave set apart from change and flux.”²²¹ Her almost self-contained domestic novels have often been critiqued for the rarity of their references to political or international events of the British Empire. While some critics argue that these narratives of Austen and this isolation from larger social contexts distort or challenge contemporary privileging of Austen and understandings of literary history, I find instead that they largely help to inform it. Part of the reason that Austen is such a valuable figure to study is that she is an object of such contention--not only among twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars, but also among popular readers. Her long reception history is filled with groups of readers battling over where to place her and her novels. In fact, much of Austen's contemporary importance is found in the many purgatories her texts inhabit. Specifically, her fans break down and blur the boundaries between the domestic and political, affective and critical readings, genre fictions and realism, popular culture and scholarly communities. Arguably, her very silence and isolation on many issues make her novels and her authorship so transferable to all of these discussions; she is made to fit nowhere and everywhere.

Tension between Austen's professional and recreational readers has existed for well over a century. In fact, this tension is so well documented and defined that the Austen canon and

²²¹ See Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); and Aileen Douglas, “Austen's Enclave: Virtue and Modernity,” *Romanticism* 5, no. 2 (1999): 147.

‘fanon’ offer a unique archive to study the cultural construction of reading tastes--an archive that has been historically situated within what it means to read a text the ‘right’ way. In reading her texts with emotional investment, Austen fandoms have problematized the boundaries between reader and object, author and character, affected and affecting. This chapter uses Austen-inspired fanfiction, nonfiction, and fictionalized biographies of Austen herself, as well as recent editions of her novels, to frame how popular readers use Austen’s “isolated exceptionalism” to establish readerly agency. Austen’s malleability is unique in that her popular readers often deliberately resist academic readings of Austen while performing critical work within a recreational context. At the same time, contemporary Austen fans create productive reading communities that contribute to the way her novels are marketed within the public sphere. In this sense, Austen fans straddle critical and recreational readings of her novels that fundamentally influence and change how her body of work is consumed in both academic and popular contexts. Ultimately, contemporary popular Austen readers are doing something much more complicated than is often recognized within the institutional setting: they use her novels to build and reinforce a strong community and to create a hybrid way of reading and interacting with a text, while simultaneously drawing attention to the arbitrary nature of the many boundaries they occupy and confront. Specifically, they challenge the boundaries between emotionally absorptive styles of reading and more conventionally academic styles of reading, particularly within the framework of privileging intertextuality and the sociology of texts. Popular Austen readers ask some of the same fundamental questions about literary value and taste that critics have always been invested in, though in a potentially less self-aware or refined capacity.²²² In this regard, they achieve

²²² This framework is indebted to Pierre Bourdieu’s work on literary tastes and John Guillory’s work on the history of the discipline and canonicity. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University

something most professional critics since at least the age of theory seem less able to do: articulating the stakes of reading critically while maintaining the permission to read recreationally.

Though contemporary Austen fandom is typically feminized, Claudia Johnson historicizes the term “Janeite,” tracing it to a group of “masculine . . . publishers, professors, novelists and literati” that developed by the end of the nineteenth century.²²³ Though this group of admirers, which included R. W. Chapman and E. M. Forster, “flaunted their devotion,” Johnson notes that “before Austen was the darling of mass culture, being a Janeite was a badge proclaiming the privilege of election, a membership in the ultimate high-status minority culture.”²²⁴ Within that culture, the ‘right’ way to read Austen was through a ‘highbrow,’ affected, analytical lens. This early version of Austen fandom blurs the boundaries between affective and more conventionally critical, or analytical, ways of reading before English departments worked to position them as opposites. This demonstration of reading as both scholarly and masculine shows not only a scholarly privileging of ways of reading but also an application of that privilege to specifically male readerships. During World War I, middle-aged men largely claimed the moniker of “Janeite” that is typically bestowed upon middle-aged women today. Using Rudyard Kipling’s short story “The Janeites” (1924), Johnson, explains that Kipling’s male characters were uninterested in the romance that many contemporary Janeites are known for today, claiming that the men in this story were rather “chilly toward women” (except

Press, 1993); and John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

²²³ Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults and Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 8.

²²⁴ Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults*, 8–9.

toward Jane of course).²²⁵ Instead, they focused on nostalgia for the carefree social gatherings as spaces where they could “piece together a shattering world” among the violence of war. Kipling’s story shows that after the war Austen became a source that “remind[ed them] of the trenches” and the community they structured around her. This affective experience allowed Austen to merge worlds, times, and subjects--something that would be unattainable without the sense of isolated “containment” her novels hold. Not only were Austen’s early fans male intellectuals, but as Kipling’s story shows, they took affective reading to such a state as to flatten history, space, and bodies in their readings of Austen.²²⁶ Johnson argues that between World War I and World War II, Austen moved from the position of an “author whose clarity is born of alienation and disillusion and whose art is uniquely comforting” to a signifier of English national identity--a space in which to remember and forget the violence of war.²²⁷ Johnson’s history of Austen’s male fandom is particularly interesting insofar as it illustrates how malleable her afterlife is. Her construction as an author is molded by the contextual uses and needs of her audiences.

Johnson argues that it was not until after World War II that Austen’s Janeite audience became a primarily feminine one. After the war, professional readers attempted to “reclaim” Jane from her adoring, male readerships in order to return to more conservative, late-Victorian conceptualizations of Austen’s character that better fit within critical narratives of distance

²²⁵ Claudia Johnson, “The Divine Miss Jane,” in *Janeites: Austen’s Disciples and Devotees*, edited by Deidre Lynch (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 31–32.

²²⁶ For more insight on the complex relationship between affected reading and scholarship, see Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008). A more detailed account of the history of women’s popular reading culture and its invisibility within academic structures is Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

²²⁷ Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults*, 127, 132.

within scholarly communities.²²⁸ The World War I association of Janeite with male bonding and “homoerotic fellowship” disrupts the straight and tidy “Aunt Jane” persona that her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, long established in his biography. Johnson argues that “Janeite discourse . . . would later be trivialized as ‘gossip’ by presumptively masculine professional critics,” which shows not only that ‘low’ literature was positioned as feminine gossip, but also that the community-building Austen’s afterlife created threatened the structure of the individual detached professional reader.²²⁹ The academy worked against emotional readings of Austen, which were largely viewed as antithetical to analytical or professional reading practices or in order to redeem her position as ‘Author’ for a more conservative and normative approach to reading that was also deeply embedded within gendered reading values. Ironically, affected readings of Austen were privileged when those readers were male, until they began to challenge narratives of normative masculinity. English departments’ separation of affective readings from critical approaches served to privilege male readers and readings that aligned with heteronormative masculinity. Johnson’s account of the changing status of Austen’s fandom demonstrates her affective plasticity, in which emotional connections between her texts and readers have been used historically as a tool to both privilege normative readers and reject subversive ones.

Where Austen’s earlier fans found community by reading her novels in shared spaces and situations, contemporary Austen fans construct their relationships to Austen and her novels

²²⁸ Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults*, 10.

²²⁹ Johnson, “Divine Miss Jane,” 33. Johnson also notes that the important Austen critic, D. W. Harding, “hinted that Austen was more of a real man . . . than [the Janeites] were” (35). In other words, Austen came to be seen as a battleground for defining masculinity through either subversive recreational readers or normative professional readers. Contemporary female fans do not cause anxiety in the same way that early Janeites did (upsetting masculine normativity, then, is more problematic than the unfashionable community building of the contemporary Austen female readerships).

around adaptation. These adaptations reinterpret her novels and characters by displacing time, re-visioning the novels from another perspective, and challenging generic constraints. Johnson points to Kipling's short story, "The Janeites" as a well-known, early reflection on the fervor of Austen's readers, but direct adaptations of her texts exponentially proliferated throughout the twentieth century. *Pride and Prejudice* was famously produced as a film in 1940 and helped to shape the relationship between the Austen fandom and early pop-culture explorations of Austen's novels, while also highlighting larger questions about how cultural value is constructed.²³⁰ Just as English departments after World War II worked to repackage Austen's character and novels in a more conservative light, the 1940 film carried (and, perhaps more importantly, still carries) the cultural value of a classic Hollywood film. The original *Pride and Prejudice* movie was largely valued for its conveyance of Austen's wit and satire, not the romantic development between Darcy and Elizabeth, which was viewed more as a subplot or a means to social commentary. The *New York Times*, for example, praised the film for being a "deliciously pert comedy of old manners, the most crisp and crackling satire in costume . . . seen on the screen."²³¹ This film was followed by many PBS and *Masterpiece Theatre* miniseries productions of Austen's novels over the next forty years--productions that took advantage of Austen's position as a 'classic' author with scholarly prestige that lent the screen adaptations a similar prestige. These early adaptations of an Austen novel helped to align mass-cultural

²³⁰ *Pride and Prejudice*, directed by Robert Leonard (MGM, 1940). *Pride and Prejudice* was also produced as a lesser-known TV movie in 1938, though it is unknown whether any copies still exist.

²³¹ Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review; 'Pride and Prejudice,' a Delightful Comedy of Manners, Seen at the Music Hall," *New York Times*, August 9, 1940, <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C04E7DC133EE432A2575AC0A96E9C946193D6CF&mcubz=3>.

readings of Austen with those of the scholarly community, where she was valued for her realism and satire.

Adaptations in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries appear to shift the focus of Austen's novels and completely reconstruct their audience. The growth in Austen fandom is in large part attributed to the success of the 1995 and 2005 film adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*.²³² Not only did these films celebrate a shift in focus to a predominantly female Austen audience by placing a heavy emphasis on the romantic tension between the main characters (both in the content of the films and in the marketing of them); they also fueled an explosion in Austen's popularity among consumers by relying less heavily on the generic constraints that secured Austen's canonicity. While many contemporary Austen readers are now first introduced to her through these films instead of her novels, perhaps most interesting is the fact that these two adaptations in particular were framed by and helped to frame the twenty-first-century Janeite: a primarily middle class, white, female fan. It is this particular audience that Austen is so well associated with today, and it is this particular version of Janeite that has produced a plethora of Austen-centric texts interested in challenging notions of genre, reader, author, and ways of reading.

Contemporary Austen adaptations and sequels have almost completely crossed the boundary into women's literature and the romance genre. While there is a tendency to ignore the subversive elements in these fan-based texts, Janeites frequently gain a sense of community or pride in being separated from scholarly reading practices and genres. While Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* famously problematizes the boundaries between high and low art, particularly with relation to romance readers, contemporary Janeites are perhaps more self-aware

²³² *Pride and Prejudice*, directed by Simon Langton (BBC, 1995); *Pride and Prejudice*, directed by Joe Wright (Working Title Films, StudioCanal, 2005).

and proud of how they use Austen to participate in the production of cultural value within a community of women. Janeites seem to take advantage of the fact that their fandom surrounds a respected author as a way to blur the lines not only between scholarly texts and Austen's, but also between Austen's and other texts in the romance genre. Just as the rebranding of Austen's fiction as romance challenges her place as 'highbrow,' the use of Austen as a romance writer likewise challenges her place as 'lowbrow.' While Janeites often distinguish between themselves and other romance readers, there still appears to be a tendency for professional readers to collapse Janeites into the same category because of how Janeites read or engage Austen, while still valuing Austen's prestige on an academic level. In this sense, professional readers have historically valued Austen the author, but not her afterlife or full reception history. This tendency is deeply connected to Radway's assertion that "the struggle over the romance is itself part of the larger struggle for the right to define and to control female sexuality," where the deliberately female Janeite audience is policed for sexualizing Austen's novels in ways the professional Austen reader is not.²³³ Furthermore, the split between professional and recreational readers of Austen is perhaps so contentious precisely because of the anxiety created by a figure who can so easily be studied alongside canonical literature and among contemporary genre fiction, such as romance.

Henry Jenkins argues that this community building and challenging of boundaries make fan culture an especially fruitful area for study. Fan readers are not isolated, and the meanings they pull from the texts are not fleeting. Instead, fandoms function as "a social process through which individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussions with

²³³Radway, 17.

other readers.”²³⁴ Austen fandoms, then, are situated in a specific public and social environment where the novels are discussed among a group of women. Her readers consume the novels within the confines of community and a quite literal version of ‘close reading.’ Ironically, scholars who challenge such responses offer compelling arguments that point to the social and political arguments these reading groups make. Not only do they produce analytical readings of the texts they consume, but they challenge institutional hierarchies about ways of reading. Deidre Lynch argues that “if it is possible to read Austen in ways that transgress the boundaries of properly literary reading, it must follow that the location of those limits is far from being apparent or fixed.” Lynch offers an explanation for contemporary professional anxieties about the dislocation of Austen by pointing out that her privileged place of isolation within the discipline of reading is in many ways undermined by popular readings of her. In this sense, the real fear is out of an inability to rescue or redeem her from the distinction between “‘romance’ and ‘realism’ [which] may have little to do with stable categories of writing.”²³⁵ Austen’s popular readers are threatening precisely because they resist institutionalized readings of her; at the same time they reveal that those literary privilegings are unstable, gendered productions of value. In other words, Austen is an ideal figure for highlighting how ambiguous and tenuous the boundaries placed on texts and readers are because Austen’s texts and readers fluctuate between genres and audiences so easily. If Austen can be easily classified as a ‘romance’ author when she is read by Janeites,

²³⁴ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 45.

²³⁵ Deidre Lynch, Introduction, *Janeites: Austen’s Disciples and Devotees*, 8–9. Recent Cognitive theorists have attempted to rescue Austen’s realism as well as Ian Watt’s teleological argument in *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), by validating Austen’s psychological formalism through scientific discourse. See Lisa Zunshine, “Why Jane Austen Was Different, and Why We May Need Cognitive Science to See It,” *Style* 41 (2007): 275–98. I would argue that this interest in psychological “depth” both responds to and emerges from the same taste from which Watt’s argument (and, to an extent, Austen’s novels themselves) emerges.

what does that say about literary hierarchies, genre, and canonicity? Lynch highlights that Austen creates anxiety precisely because her afterlife makes us aware of the boundaries between high and low readers and texts, while simultaneously revealing the ambivalence of those boundaries.

Janeites have historically been classified as ‘lowbrow’ readers because they challenge conservative values about texts and how to read them. Though twenty-first-century Janeites are primarily middle-class women, they are largely influenced by and inherit some of the same rejections that early Janeites underwent. The Jane Austen fandom is frequently trivialized for focusing too much on the romantic elements of the plots, therefore reducing the texts and readings to “genre” fiction. While contemporary Janeites are also categorized as ‘affective,’ they are not viewed as dangerous in the way that early Janeites were--their use of Austen to build community, though unfashionable, is not threatening as it does not challenge notions of femininity in the way that early twentieth-century Janeites challenged normative masculinity. Just as the academy rejected the original Janeites for their affective relationship to Austen’s novels, contemporary Janeites are particularly hostile toward the institutional privileging of Austen that reads her but does not ‘get’ her. However, part of this division between the two classes of readers in each case stems from the fact that the affective relations are experienced through avenues that are institutionally out of style. Indeed, contemporary Janeite fandom participates in several reading practices that are critically passé. For instance, there is a professed and, more importantly, unashamed desire among contemporary fans, as Mary Ann O’Farrell says, to “know what Jane Austen was like--to want to personify . . . to want something in excess of what historicist contextualization or biographical detail might yield.” This desire that is fundamentally framed through authorial intent also expresses a willingness to engage in a form

of historicism. This desire to ‘know’ Austen traces back to the late eighteenth century. The popularity that Austen-Leigh’s biography brought forth created a pious image of Austen, but not a very specific one (the generic “dear Aunt Jane” image that still maintains popularity). Johnson argues that “Austen’s uncanny textual power has for the most part depended on the vanishment of her body, that one’s presence has required the other’s absence,” so that from the moment Austen’s brother Henry “outed” her as an author, he de-specified her.²³⁶ Because there is a plethora of pseudo biographies and falsified information on the author to appeal to, readers are free to construct their ideal version of Austen that best aligns with their reading community and/or approach to reading her. Whether they are aware of it or not, Austen’s fans are asking and responding to questions about the role of the author and bibliographical history that critics have always puzzled through.

This desire to ‘know’ Jane extends so deeply that Austen’s admirers frequently turn her into a character in which they are free to hypothesize about her life. O’Farrell describes this desire to know Austen as that of “asking of an absent object,” a “possession.”²³⁷ In this paradigm, Austen loses her subjectivity and becomes an object--one that is more privileged because it is unattainable. Quite possibly, Austen’s ambiguities encourage contemporary Janeites to restructure Austen’s identity for her; such restructuring is often achieved by blurring the lines between author and character, history and fiction. For instance, biographies of Austen dating before the twentieth century mention very little about her personal life. There is generally brief mention of her Christianity and family relationships. Her nephew’s 1871 biography contains a one-sentence allusion to Austen’s romantic relationships, which claims, “if Jane ever loved, it

²³⁶ Mary Ann O’Farrell, “Jane Austen’s Friendship,” in Lynch, 45; Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults*, 18, 27.

²³⁷ O’Farrell, 59.

was this unnamed gentleman; but the acquaintance had been short.” This is the first documented mention of Austen’s friendship with the now-famous Thomas Lefroy. The romantic connection between the two is only briefly hinted at. Indeed, this is the only sentence in her nephew’s entire biography that reflects on either him or any other romantic encounter in Austen’s life. This vague sentence, however, has been used to expand and, in some ways, create a love-life for fans interested in Austen’s personal experiences. In her 1938 Austen biography, Elizabeth Jenkins mentions Thomas Lefroy admitted that he “had once been in love with the great Jane Austen: ‘but it was a boy’s love.’” This romantic connection became increasingly intensified over the years, so that by the time Carol Shields’s 2001 biography was released, she suggested that Austen herself was “thoroughly smitten” with Lefroy and that “she was snatched from the good novel she had imagined herself into and placed into an alternative narrative of class bitterness.”²³⁸ Shields’s recollection suggests that Austen’s novels were unable to affect her desired love-life--that she created her characters and their intimate relationships as a way to cope with the melancholic termination of her own potential happily ever after.

Austen’s fleeting romantic connection became gradually amplified over the years, earning an entire chapter in Jon Spence’s popular 2003 biography *Becoming Jane Austen: A Life* and, eventually, it consumed the entire plot of the 2007 film the biography inspired.²³⁹ This desire to ‘know’ Austen translates into a conflation of Austen’s unknown history with that of her characters’. Indeed, the plotline of *Becoming Jane* follows that of Austen’s own *Pride and Prejudice*, with the characters themselves picking up traits from Elizabeth Bennet and Mr.

²³⁸ James Edward Austen-Leigh, *Memoir of Jane Austen*, edited by R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1926), 29; Elizabeth Jenkins, *Jane Austen: A Biography* (London: Gollancz, 1938), 43; Carol Shields, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 49–50.

²³⁹ Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen: A Life* (2003; New York: Hambleton Continuum, 2007); *Becoming Jane*, directed by Julian Jarrold (BBC Films, 2007).

Darcy: like Elizabeth, Jane is witty and prejudiced, and like Darcy, LeFroy is condescending and full of pride. This ‘biofic’ builds up slowly to the ultimate disappointment: Jane, of course, cannot end up married to Lefroy, though he does name his daughter after her. The writers of the film put together a narrative of Austen’s life using letters and biographies but also admit to using parts of her novels to fill in the gaps.²⁴⁰ This production suggests a desire to see a correlation between Austen and her characters, a confirmation that somehow the emotional relationship readers have with the novels grows more authentic by inviting the author herself to become emotionally invested in her characters and the romantic sub-plot. At the same time, Austen’s identity is happily constructed through a collage of history and fiction, suggesting that the boundaries between the two are not completely stable. This blurred line is something at which Austen herself pokes fun in *Northanger Abbey*, a novel focused on highlighting a character who similarly straddles the lines between the “real” world and books. Though Catherine Morland is often ridiculed for not being able to distinguish between the two, she also astutely points out how problematic the boundaries between history and fiction are: “[history] is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention. The speeches that are put into the heroes’ mouths, their thoughts and designs--the chief of all this must be invention, and invention is what delights me in other books.”²⁴¹ Here Catherine, a character generally perceived as ridiculous for collapsing reality with her reading of gothic novels, perceptively points out how tenuous the line between fact and fiction really is.

Catherine’s role as an embodied reader seamlessly challenging reading practices and generic constraints may well encourage Austen’s fans to do the same (after all, what is

²⁴⁰ “The Art of Adaptation: Becoming Jane,” *The Writing Studio*, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20071024221712/http://www.writingstudio.co.za/page1718.html>.

²⁴¹ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1817; New York: Penguin, 2003), 104.

Northanger Abbey if not a satirical adaptation of Charlotte Lennox's 1752 *The Female Quixote*?). Though fictionalized fan constructions of Austen's life do not claim to be biographical, they frequently play with the boundaries between history and fiction in a way that is often more self-reflexive than most biographers. Syrie James's 2014 novel *Jane Austen's First Love* is a particularly useful example of a fan-created novel that blends fictional and nonfictional aspects of Austen's life and novels to intertextually construct Austen. This novel imagines a younger Austen as she is introduced to another historically speculated love interest: Edward Taylor. Austen's character is described in similar ways to Elizabeth Bennet's, and her sister Cassandra's to Jane Bennet's. However, this novel is perhaps more interesting than the 2007 film in that it fills in the gaps by utilizing several of Austen's novels, thereby constructing Austen's identity through her entire corpus. Jane enters into a discussion of the novel as a genre with Edward, just as Catherine Morland discusses the "growing tastes for such works" with Henry Tilney. Like Emma, Jane plays the role of matchmaker, fixing her sister up with Mr. Paylor and concocting roles in a home theatrical to push certain pairings together--a theatrical presentation that takes up as much time in James's novel as it does in *Mansfield Park*. This attempt to understand Austen through the employment of several of her novels constitutes a creative way to think about the role of the author, and as a tactic it is not completely disconnected from how professional readers use pieces of history and fiction to do the same. The discussion questions at the end of James's text even ask the reader to think about how "this rendering of [Austen's] early life reflect[s] her own fiction," suggesting that the novel gains value among Janeites by mapping Austen's novels onto her life.²⁴² Austen becomes a found object by establishing her characters as

²⁴² Syrie James, *Jane Austen's First Love* (New York: Berkley, 2014), 81, 389.

representative of herself. This way her fans can read and understand her, just as they read and understand the characters in her novels.

I do not want to suggest that these revisionist writings of Austen are necessarily subversive nor that they model uniformly subversive reading practices. This sort of correction into her romantic past highlights part of the trouble readers have with what Lynch calls “her problematic femaleness [that] is compounded by her spinsterhood and childlessness.”²⁴³ Though Lynch criticizes academic readings that contribute to this destabilization of Austen’s gender, Austen’s fandoms participate in a similar kind of reparative reading of her. Indeed, it might be why this desire to bring romance back to Austen is such a popular one. However, it is important to note that these fantasies of Austen remain temporary; at the end of each reconstruction of her past, Austen remains unmarried and childless. While her fans spend time imagining what Austen’s life may have been like, they almost never end the story rejecting known elements of her history. Austen’s fans allow themselves to participate in the thought experiment of constructing a fictional identity for Jane that more satisfactorily aligns with the romantic elements of her novels, while still remaining true to Austen’s known history. Rather than choosing between fiction and reality, Austen fans straddle both.

Moreover, this desire to ‘know’ and ‘own’ Austen in popular contexts is not a purely feminine one, though it is irreparably tied to gender and exclusion. Nor are all contemporary Austen fans united toward the same approach of reading her. Just as the division between scholarly and recreational readers is problematic, so too is the act of lumping all Austen fans together. The entire project of Robert Rodi’s *Bitch in a Bonnet: Reclaiming Jane Austen from the Stiffs, the Snobs, the Simps and the Saps*, for instance, is to assert a claim on Austen that is “more

²⁴³Lynch, 9.

binding than most” because both Austen and Rodi are satirical writers. He mentions his shame (as a “man of the world”) in finding himself such an Austen fan and therefore spends his book trying to convince his readers that Austen is not the “quaint and darling, doe-eyed and demure, parochial if not pastoral, and dizzily, swooningly romantic . . . goddess of ‘chick lit.’”²⁴⁴ On the one hand, Rodi, like Austen, blurs the boundaries of reading. He aligns himself with the fan community, but he also draws attention to his distaste of Austen’s generic fluidity, much preferring the domestic satire she is well known for among academics. He identifies a satirical Austen as the antithesis of “chick lit,” while suggesting her contemporary female fans are resistant to the idea that Austen can be both romantic and witty. His text is set up to walk the reader through his own readings of three of Austen’s novels, attempting to persuade the reader that Austen is a “sly, subversive, a clear-eyed Social Darwinist,” a bitch in a bonnet. Though he attempts to rescue Austen from what he deems a ‘low’ readership, the real problem stems from his imagining himself the “colleague” of a “great writer reduced to a marketing brand.” On some level, Rodi marks his own generic and literary status as connected to Austen’s; if she crosses into ‘low’ art, he runs the risk of following. Rodi’s anxiety over Austen’s placement within the romance genre exists, in part, because his identity as an author is deeply connected to how he perceives Austen’s literary identity. As he discusses her novels, he answers his own discussion questions and draws connections among his own life, Austen’s, the “saps” from whom he tries to redeem her, and contemporary society, collapsing boundaries just as he tries to construct them. Though he sets up to reclaim Austen for the more analytical literary elite, his project potentially persuades some readers to engage in a different sort of affective response to Austen’s archive by reading along with him, suggesting that affective reading is capable of transgressing boundaries

²⁴⁴ Robert Rodi, *Bitch in a Bonnet: Reclaiming Jane Austen from the Stiffs, the Snobs, the Simps and the Saps* (Lexington, KY: Independent, 2012), 1.

of literary value as well. In trying to prove that masculine readers ‘know’ Austen best, he participates in the very reading culture and practice he detests: he reads Austen ‘too closely’ and on emotional terms, despite trying to redeem the formalism of her satire and her place among the professional reader/writer. At the same time, however, Rodi highlights one of the heightened tensions of Austen’s afterlife: that serious or critical readers of Austen are separate from her largely female contemporary fandom--a correction that Rodi intends to make to align more comfortably his own role of ‘author’ with Austen’s. Ultimately, however, he participates in a similar form of meaning-building as the very Janeites he critiques. His identity as an author is shaped by reclaiming Austen’s.

Perhaps more interesting than the desire to spend more time with Austen and in the worlds she creates is the deconstruction of Austen’s world and her contemporary readers’ world, insofar as Austen’s afterlife exists in the embodied lives of her readers. Pamela Aidan’s trilogy *Fitzwilliam Darcy, Gentleman* offers one example of a Janeite who has worked to make her profession and her personal life resemble Austen’s novels as closely as possible. Aidan works to dismantle the boundaries not only between the reader and Austen, but also between Austen and the authors of her adaptations, where Austen’s adaptors take on the role and authority of Austen while establishing an affective, community-based relationship with theirs and Austen’s fans. Aidan’s trilogy focuses on retelling *Pride and Prejudice* through the perspective of Darcy. In this sense, Aidan is pushed into the position of Austen (as the author of the text), but Aidan takes three novels to tell the story that Austen told in one. This choice suggests a desire to linger in the text longer than Austen allows her readers to do. The affective experience is so profound for Aidan and her readers that they want to repeat and prolong it for as long as possible. The sheer breadth of the trilogy hints of the desire to continue the reading practice beyond the initial

experience of reading *Pride and Prejudice*; Aidan and authors who work within a similar strategy of extending or reframing an already existing plot ultimately suggest that readers have the power to continue engaging with texts beyond the first read-through. Not only does Aidan “answer the long-standing question” that readers want to know: “Who is Fitzwilliam Darcy?” She also guides her readers on how to experience both her own novels and Austen’s. The first novel in the trilogy, *An Assembly Such as This*, is equipped with a reading group guide. This paratext is packed with twelve questions that ask readers to delve deeper into the novel’s content by exploring the character’s choices and emotional reactions throughout the text. Readers are asked to reflect not only on the text itself but on their own affective relationship to it. Aidan’s readers are asked if “[they] sympathize with Fletcher,” “how [they] feel about the ending of this first part of the trilogy,” if the characters “live up to [their] expectations,” and more.²⁴⁵ Consequently, readers are guided to engage with the text on affective terms; they are asked to interrogate not only the characters’ motivations but their own relationships to those characters and situations. Aidan’s text asks its readers to blur the boundaries between novel and reality--to extend the affective experience beyond the parameters of the material text.

These blurred boundaries contained within Aidan’s text extend into a further attempt to liken Aidan to Austen, to suggest that they are part of the same mold. After the book club discussion questions, there is a Q and A with Aidan herself. One of the comments posed suggests that Aidan owes her own “marital happiness to Jane Austen” and follows with a question about how she met her husband. Aidan replies with the following anecdote:

²⁴⁵ Pamela Aidan, *An Assembly Such as This: A Novel of Fitzwilliam Darcy, Gentleman* (New York: Touchstone Book, 2003), I: 251. Gerard Genette’s *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) is foundational for framing the importance of paratexts in book history.

I was living in Georgia and halfway through the online writing of the second book in my trilogy, *Duty and Desire*, I received my first fan letter from a man. I had received many letters of appreciation, but this was the first from someone who communicated appreciation *and* criticism in a very thoughtful, insightful manner. He lived in Idaho and his fascination with Austen had begun just before the A&E movie came out when one of his daughters strongly suggested he read *Pride and Prejudice*. He did and then eagerly devoured her remaining books and fell in love with the movie. He then began to search the Internet for more about Austen, discovered my work at The Republic of Pemberley, and wrote of his pleasure in my story. I wrote back thanking him for his male perspective, especially as I was presuming to write from a man's point of view. His next communication to me was written *as* Darcy! What a shock to open up an e-mail from my own character commending me on the job I was doing creating his life! We continued to correspond about the story (Michael writing as himself) and then eventually on a personal level for almost four years before we ever met. A year after we met, I moved from Georgia to Idaho and we were married. We share so many things and are extremely happy with each other! Women have asked me where to find a Darcy; I tell them he's already taken!²⁴⁶

Aidan's story found in the paratext of her novel functions on several complicated levels. First, Aidan sets herself up both as a contemporary embodiment of Austen, by rewriting her novel with triple the content of the original, and as Elizabeth Bennet, by constructing Aidan's husband as the embodiment of Darcy. Aidan even calls Darcy "[her] own character," which suggests that she also disintegrates the boundary between herself and Austen. That collapsed barrier ultimately

²⁴⁶ Aidan, Q & A, n.p. (254–55).

allows her to frame her husband as the embodiment of Darcy. Not only does Aidan liken herself to Austen; Aidan also breaks down the relationship between herself and Elizabeth Bennet by repeating elements of *Pride and Prejudice*: she and her husband initially communicate by writing letters as the characters. Indeed, this image is steeped in Austen fandom. The letter scene in which Elizabeth finally understands Darcy's motivations and experiences some sort of affective and psychological change in how she views him is iconic in Austen fan culture. Aidan situates herself within the story of Austen's novel but focuses completely on the moments filled with the most emotional resonance--in a way aligning her approach to Austen as that of a fan. By collapsing these boundaries, Aidan signals that she is emotionally indebted to Austen, which allows Aidan to acknowledge and invoke Austen's authority while temporarily borrowing it. Indeed, Aidan's ability to collapse the boundary between the fictional and the factual allows her story to exist within the idea that Austen's life both belongs to and benefits her fans, insofar as her fans read Austen for an emotional connection.

By relating to her readers the story about meeting her husband, Aidan sends the message that readers of Austen (and, subsequently, sequels and rewrites of Austen) will be able to obtain a similar romantic depth by simply interacting and engaging with Austen's world. In this way, Aidan's novel is marketed to imply that Austen's novels have a kind of embodied power in the 'real' world. The affective relationship that Janeites forge with Austen's novels becomes intensified through the paratextual material that suggest Austen's stories directly project onto and affect the lives of her consumers. At the same time, this implied position reestablishes the 'right' way to read Austen--affectively, not analytically. Indeed, part of Aidan's story is about a fan of hers (an affective reader who experienced "pleasure" while reading the novel), who acquires further affective depth in his own life by reading Austen and by rewriting himself into that story.

It is through a sort of affective reading that Austen's fans are able to blur the lines between character, author, reader, fiction, and reality.

While Janeites blur the boundaries between their lives and the lives of Austen's characters, they also use Austen's novels to make connections to other Janeites. Austen is thereby used to construct both their individual identity and reading community. For example, Aidan's novel has a supplemental section that helps to "Enhance Your Book Club Experience," in which readers are encouraged to "Don [Their] Regency Best," and to have the "next Book Club meeting over tea and sweets."²⁴⁷ In each case, readers are encouraged not only to think about their relationship to Austen and the characters in her novels but also to act out the lifestyle of those characters. Such encouragement constitutes an explicit invitation to engage in the afterlife of each of the novels by conflating Austen's historical moment with that of her contemporary fans. Flattening Austen's historicity becomes a space of productive affect, which does not close when the book does. At the same time, Aidan's readers are encouraged to "discuss" these questions within reading groups, which suggests that for this particular fandom, the participatory community is a catalyst for breaking down these barriers.

Austen fanfictions break down the barriers between readers and texts not only through developing community but also by challenging hermeneutics and the process of reading. Usually this works by extending the process of reading beyond the material constraints of the story through paratextual material that allows readers to frame Austen and her characters in terms of the readers' own lives. At the same time, such paratexts allow readers not only to engage with the Austen's afterlife but to solidify the idea that the afterlife of these novels is intertwined within her fandom. In Nancy Moser's *Just Jane: A Novel of Jane Austen's Life*, readers

²⁴⁷ Aidan, I: 251.

encounter another fictionalization of Austen's romantic life. In Moser's novel and the subsequent paratext, readers are again directed to engage with Jane and her life in terms of an emotional bond through which readers draw explicit connections between themselves and the characters: "Jane is faced with a huge disappointment in regard to Tom Lefroy. . . . [W]hen have you wallowed in unhappiness?"; "Jane finds she cannot create without having certain elements in place. . . . [W]hat are the elements you need in order to create?" These reading-group-style questions work to break down the barrier between Austen and her readers. Moser's text does this after first disassembling the barrier between Austen the author and Austen the character. Similarly, in James's *Jane Austen's First Love*, the plot of the novel and following discussion questions are used to get the readers to think about their own lives: "Did your first love change you--for better or worse? How are past relationships of value to our character despite their limited romantic success?"²⁴⁸ Here, readers are expected to explicitly think about themselves as characters in relation to Austen, through which reading is made more meaningful by conflating the roles of reader, author, and character. Blurring or challenging these boundaries becomes a productive way to establish a meaningful relationship with Austen and her novels, while

²⁴⁸ Nancy Moser, *Just Jane: A Novel of Jane Austen's Life* (2007; Escondido, CA: Livingstone, 2012), 365–66.; James, *Jane Austen's First Love*, 389–91. Several other Austen fanfictions include discussion questions--some explicitly offered as "a guide to reading" the novel. The paratext frequently found in these texts relies on the fact that Austen's recreational readers want to spend as much time with Austen and her characters, so that the activity of reading Austen does not end when the book does. See, for example, *Jane Austen Made Me Do It: Original Stories Inspired by Literature's Most Astute Observer of the Human Heart*, ed. Laurel Ann Nattress (New York: Ballantine Books Trade Paperbacks, 2011); Syrie James, *The Missing Manuscript of Jane Austen* (New York: Berkley, 2012). *The Missing Manuscript of Jane Austen* recounts the story of an Austen scholar and fan happening upon an unknown Austen novel, allowing the character to live out the desire to read more of Austen's texts, learning more about her own world as she learns more about Austen's. This novel, perhaps more than most others, demonstrates the way Austen fans straddle the line between critical scholar and devoted fan; James's protagonist functions as both, which suggests that the binary between readers is an unstable one.

simultaneously suggesting that the process of reading and engaging with these novels does not end when the material book closes. Austen fans who take up the offer participate in a cyclic reading practice in which they use their personal experiences to better understand Austen's characters and, in turn, use their experience of reading Austen to better understand their own experiences and emotions.

The conflation of author and reader that is found in much of the Austen fanfiction is also often formally integrated into it. Emma Campbell Webster's build-your-own-adventure-novel, *Lost in Austen: Create Your Own Jane Austen Adventure*, offers readers a chance to be Elizabeth Bennet while they parse their way through recognizable plots and character interactions. After each scene, the reader must answer period-specific trivia while making their own choices about Austen's characters, the ultimate goal being to achieve a union "both prudently *and* for love," as "it is a truth universally acknowledged that a young Austen heroine must be in want of a husband." Though often times the options are consciously ridiculous and satirical, Webster's novel offers readers a chance to engage in reading actively, exercising their agency over Austen's world in ways that traditional structures of reading do not allow. Indeed, no two stories (or readings) end up alike. Though less participatory, *The Jane Austen Guide to Happily Ever After* and *A Jane Austen Devotional* offer similar ways to break down the reader/object barrier. In both texts, readers are encouraged to use Austen as a way to guide their life choices beyond the material text, allowing Austen to become a pedagogical and moral guide beyond her grave.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Emma Campbell Webster and Jane Austen, *Lost in Austen: Create Your Own Jane Austen Adventure* (New York: Riverhead, 2007); Elizabeth Kantor, *The Jane Austen Guide to Happily Ever After* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2012); Thomas Nelson and Jane Austen, *A Jane Austen Devotional* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012). Fictionalized accounts of this type of fan behavior are quite common. See *Austenland*, directed by Jerusha Hess (Fickle Fish Films, Moxie Pictures, 2013); *The Jane Austen Book Club*, directed by Robin Swicord (Sony Pictures Classics, 2007). In both films, the characters use Austen to navigate their daily lives, looking to her for

Today, Janeite culture is so popular that there is even a plethora of films and novels about her fans, which suggests that modern readers are as much a part of Austen's afterlife as her novels are. The 2008 British miniseries, *Lost in Austen*, tells the story of a dissatisfied Amanda Price, an Austen fan who literally falls into *Pride and Prejudice* through her bathroom and exchanges historical eras with Elizabeth Bennet.²⁵⁰ Armed with expectations, Amanda is frustrated by her instant dislike of Darcy and spends most of her time trying to keep the novel 'on the right track.' With Elizabeth stuck in the twenty-first-century, Amanda slowly begins to take her place in all of the familiar scenes, turning some into disasters. Not only does Amanda's interaction with Austen's fictional regency help her to understand her own goals and desires in life, but she begins to understand Austen's characters even better than Austen does. In this "real" *Pride and Prejudice*, Wickham is actually a "good guy" and Caroline Bingley a lesbian--to which Amanda quietly notes that "Austen would be surprised she'd written that." The ultimate suggestion here is that Austen's characters have lives beyond their containment within their novels--and that fans have access to uncovering that information and character depth beyond even Austen's control. While challenging canonical readings of the novel, Amanda frequently inserts what Kylie Mirmohamadi calls the "fanon." She eventually asks Darcy to jump into his pond so that he can emerge with his wet clothes highlighting his masculine frame, reenacting the popular scene in the 1995 BBC production in which Colin Firth emerges from the water--a scene that does not occur in Austen's novel but that in the BBC production famously romanticizes Austen's novel for the late-twentieth-century audience. This sort of intertextuality is common in Austen fan productions and "allows the fan author to give a self-reflexive account of the

guidance (often on romantic concerns). In both cases, Austen fandom leads the characters to happy endings, after making them suffer for a while, of course.

²⁵⁰ *Lost in Austen*, directed by Dan Zeff (UK: Mammoth Screen Ltd, 2008).

interrelationships . . . in a narrative gesture that may at first be more readily associated with postmodernism than genre fiction.”²⁵¹ This ability to reference Austen’s reception and afterlife in multiple media and capacities demonstrates how Janeites frequently extend Austen’s archive beyond her original novels: Austen is constantly rebuilt and reshaped around her readers’ changing engagement with her texts and adaptations.

While contemporary popular readers of Austen offer new ways of reading the author through the lens of ‘romance,’ they also challenge the boundaries of other generic configurations.²⁵² Perhaps Austen’s domestic isolation allows her texts and fandom to be shaped not only by her historicity and the afterlives of her texts but also by other fads and trends that offer new and perceptive ways to reflect on earlier tensions among Austen’s readers. Many Austen novels are rewritten through a gothic or supernatural lens. For instance, Amanda Grange’s *Mr. Darcy, Vampire* (2009), Regina Jeffers’s *Vampire Darcy’s Desire* (2009), the Quirk Classics *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), and *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* (2009) are just a few of the most popular. Each of these novels was produced after

²⁵¹ Kylie Mirmohamadi, *The Digital Afterlives of Jane Austen: Janeites at the Keyboard* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 69–70. Like Aidan’s *The Fitzwilliam Darcy, Gentleman Trilogy*, a number of Austen fanfiction spends time redeeming unpopular characters or retelling stories from different perspectives, in an effort to get to “know” the characters better. See Colleen McCullough and Jane Austen, *The Independence of Miss Mary Bennet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008).

²⁵² See Andrew Higson, “English Heritage, English Literature, English Cinema: Selling Jane Austen to Movie Audiences in the 1990s,” in *Janespotting and Beyond: British Heritage Retrovisions Since the Mid-1990s*, edited by Eckart Voigts-Virchow (Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 2004), 35–50. Higson makes a compelling argument that Austen film adaptations also work to rebrand Austen through romance as “Hollywood romantic comedies, albeit in period garb” that “sex up the novels” (41, 43). In this way, they are able to function in both “mainstream cinemas and specialized art-houses” (47). Though I think Higson intends this as a critique of Austen fandom, the complexity of audience and genre that this argument presents also seems to open up Austen’s plurality of meanings by subverting multiple value hierarchies at once.

zombie and vampire folklore experienced a surge in popularity among consumers of genre fiction. These texts are particularly interesting considering that some academics have long cast Austen as a realist writer, positioning her against the Gothic novel in the process. Indeed, *Northanger Abbey* devotes most of its time to satirizing the genre. Claudia Johnson points out, however, that the popular Quirk Classics texts do this themselves and in many ways carry on Austen's own sense of irony. Johnson argues that his positioning of Austen against the gothic is actually antithetical to how she was viewed during her Victorian reception. Johnson attributes nineteenth-century gothic readings of Austen as a reaction to the "disenchantment" of modernity; "thinking of Austen in the context of fairies was an effortless association for Victorian Janeites and a positively foundational one."²⁵³ Contemporary Janeites can be read as emerging from this same strain of reading as Austen's early readers--resurrecting her body and those of her characters. In doing so, Janeites reject the long-standing academic tradition of reading Austen as a foundational realist author.

This connection between Austen and the supernatural has even influenced recent marketing approaches to her novels--altering both their genre and their audience. In 2009, HarperTeen released an edition of *Pride and Prejudice* with cover art inspired by Stephanie Meyer's best selling *Twilight* (2006) series. This edition is part of a larger marketing campaign to promote the *Twilight* protagonists' (Edward Cullen and Bella Swan) "favorite books," which includes several other Austen novels (as well as *Romeo & Juliet* and *Wuthering Heights*).²⁵⁴ The back blurb of this edition positions the novel as "one of the most captivating love stories of all time," with the front cover detailing that Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship is "The Love That

²⁵³ Johnson, *Jane Austen's Cults*, 77.

²⁵⁴ These HarperTeen editions as a whole are discussed in Chapter 5 in more detail.

Started It All.”²⁵⁵ Indeed, the blurb suggests that the romance plot is the only content of the novel. Though there is clear romance branding in this paratext, it also attempts to align Austen’s characters with Meyer’s supernatural ones: “Darcy had never been so bewitched by a woman . . . with all the forces of the world conspiring to keep [them] apart, how will fate manage to bring them together?” This supernatural rhetoric continues the tradition of challenging Austen’s space in the gothic/realist tension. At the same time, the HarperTeen edition removes the novel from its historicity by simultaneously engaging and disengaging with it. The phrase “The Love That Started It All” has multiple temporalities: *Pride and Prejudice* as coming before *Twilight*, as influencing or creating *Twilight*, or as being self-contained within Meyer’s novel. *Pride and Prejudice* is read by *Twilight*’s characters, but the “favorite books” mentality of fictional characters suggests that the novel exists as a fiction within a fiction. In either case, the line between the canonical and the popular becomes difficult to distinguish.

The HarperTeen edition serves another important purpose: it introduces a specific audience to Austen and guides their reading of her novels. As William St. Clair points out, “readers have never confined their reading to contemporary texts. . . . chronological linearity was [never] the norm.”²⁵⁶ While he speaks specifically about Victorian and Romantic readers, his argument is easily applied to contemporary readers as well. Contemporary young-adult marketing extends his argument by encouraging consumers to think about how reading contemporary genre fiction alongside canonical texts changes how readers understand and interact with those texts. This specific marketing campaign opens up a clear avenue into understanding how contemporary readers are engaging with historical texts. The edition comes

²⁵⁵ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813 (New York: HarperTeen, 2009).

²⁵⁶ William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

stocked with extras that include “The Jane Austen--*Twilight* Zone” (an “essay” that highlights all of the important connections between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Twilight*); “QUIZ: Which *Pride & Prejudice* Girl Are You?” (modeled after quizzes that can be found in popular teen magazines); “10 Things You Didn’t Know About Jane Austen” (which primarily focuses on elaborations of her love life--much of which are exaggerated and factually unverifiable); and “What if Darcy and Elizabeth Lived Now and Were on Facebook?” (a segment in which the characters answer questions about their profile pictures, likes, and dislikes). The latter example, in particular, reinforces the ambiguous temporality of Austen’s texts by deliberately mixing the old with the new. The character “personalities” remain the same, yet they engage in contemporary discourse and with contemporary technologies. In this section, Elizabeth Bennet tells the reader that her favorite books are “*Wuthering Heights* [a shameless plug for another HarperTeen edition], *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Awakening*, anything by Edith Wharton, and *Middlemarch*” and that her favorite musicians include The Decemberists and Regina Spektor.²⁵⁷ Though awkward at first, this paratext allows contemporary readers to engage with the novel on their own terms, and, for them, Elizabeth Bennet exists in all of these periods--outside of historical containment, much like Austen herself.

The paratextual material has no interest in embedding Austen in scholarly or historical discourse but instead forges a social relationship between the romantic author and the romance reader. This bridges the often intimidating gap between eighteenth-century fictional characters and teenage girls, making the novel potentially more approachable and consumable. Perhaps Austen’s association with the “Romantic” period makes it easy for publishers to conflate her work with the contemporary romance genre. The fact that the term *romance* operates in two

²⁵⁷ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (HarperTeen), 9.

separate discursive circles (one referring to a historical time period, the other referring to the plot or content of the story) becomes slippery or ambivalent. Ultimately, the edition attempts to forge a connection between the characters and the readers in a way that more traditional Austen editions cannot, not only across books but across centuries. The HarperTeen text asks its readers to evaluate, interpret, and engage with *Pride and Prejudice* within contemporary constraints, not historical ones. At the same time, consumers are also pushed to understand that readers of young adult fiction, such as *Twilight*, might not be completely separable from readers of canonical authors, such as Austen.²⁵⁸

Though Austen's contemporary fans do not explicitly question literary theory, their relationship to Austen and her texts runs parallel to reader-response theories, which emphasize that hermeneutic value is often constructed by the reader. Wimsatt & Beardsley's "Intentional Fallacy," for instance, ushered in the generally accepted argument that, at the very least, the meaning of the text extends beyond what the author intended.²⁵⁹ Though a rejection of Wimsatt & Beardsley's attempt to validate and preserve the text "itself" helped lead to the advent of reader-response theory, Austen fans help to reveal how ambiguous and ambivalent a concept like literary value is. Ultimately, Austen fans and adapters appear interested in the same interrogation of value critics have puzzled over for decades. Indeed, fanfiction's inclusion of paratextual

²⁵⁸ The success of the relationship HarperTeen establishes with Austen and young-adult supernatural romance is reflected in Val McDermid's popular 2014 novel *Northanger Abbey*. This modern retelling finds Cat, a twenty-first-century teenager obsessed with "contemporary vampire romance" novels, hoping to become the heroine of her own novel. Austen's satire on the gothic becomes a modern satire on *Twilight*. Cat is found at moments reading *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies*, as well as referencing her appreciation for Victorian fanfiction. This functions as another example of the self-reflexivity Mirmohamadi highlights, suggesting that Austen rewrites and fan culture are more complex and analytical than they are often given credit for.

²⁵⁹ W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1954).

materials and heavy focus on the role of the reader and intertextuality are not altogether dissimilar from the scholarly investment in the sociology of literature, textual studies, and reception theory. At the same time, Austen's contemporary fans clearly ask some of the same questions about the roles of genres, authors, readers, and texts that critics have always been interested in. Austen is a particularly useful figure for highlighting how tenuous the boundaries between the popular and the scholarly are precisely because her texts and her readers are able to blur and cross them so easily.

Chapter 5

Neo-Victorian Readers and the Proliferation of Young Adult Literature

With hit franchises like *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) and *Twilight* (2005-2008),²⁶⁰ it comes as no surprise that the “young adult” genre is one of the fastest growing markets in the book business. While marketed towards teenagers, novels that fall under the young adult category are also frequently read by adults--a cohort that has grown increasingly proud of their reading tastes thanks to the support of reading groups and online book communities.²⁶¹ Recently, however, there have been attempts to re-categorize western canonical works, marketing them in a way that suggests that they too ought to be found on YA bookshelves. This work is being done by stripping western canonical novels from their tired and traditional covers, and then replacing them with flashy new containers. While the text inside is rarely altered, these new, teen-friendly book covers vary from colorful prints and interesting fonts, to images which place well-known characters into contemporary settings. At the same time, there is a growing trend for bestselling YA authors to experiment with modern-day retellings of Victorian classics, to develop steampunk series that reimagine the Victorian period while focusing on contemporary young adult tropes, and to create alternative histories that allow young adult novels to mix modern social, political, and cultural tastes with retellings of documented nineteenth-century events, characters, and movements. Although this rebranding of Victorian novels and culture within the parameters of the young adult genre is likely motivated by marketing trends and profit margins in an increasingly commercialized and pressurized publishing culture, it sheds a light on non-academic uses of generic reception, reader-response theory, and textual studies in a way that

²⁶⁰ Stephanie Meyer, *Twilight*, Twilight Series (Little, Brown and Company, 2005).

²⁶¹ Scholastic even has a social media presence under the handle @IreadYA, which is devoted to spreading young adult pride and validation to a larger group of readers--adults included.

bridges the gap between twenty-first-century consumer and academic cultures. This chapter will examine a sampling of popular young adult texts within the last decade that have altered how contemporary readers engage with nineteenth-century novels in a way that both anticipates and responds to generic malleability.

In 2009, roughly one year after the *Twilight*²⁶² film was released in theaters, HarperCollins began releasing a series of *Twilight*-inspired editions of classics. These classics were published through their young adult imprint, HarperTeen, and initially included *Pride & Prejudice*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.²⁶³ While several other classic novels were subsequently released in this series (no doubt due to the economic success of this initial HarperTeen release), these four are particularly compelling because not only do they piggyback off of *Twilight*'s teen market, they also helped to inspire it.²⁶⁴ While it might seem startling from an ivory-tower perspective that a young adult saga about sparkling vampires and paranormal romance could have anything to do with these four highly-esteemed literary texts, Stephanie Meyer openly acknowledges that she roughly adapted each of the four novels in her series from these four canonical storylines. And while Shakespeare, Brontë, and Austen's prose styles are strikingly dissimilar to Meyer's, her novels do loosely mimic some of the significant plot developments of her predecessors.

In this chapter, I will primarily focus on the 2009 HarperTeen edition of *Wuthering Heights*, as well as popular young adult steampunk and fantasy novels, in order to argue that

²⁶² Catherine Hardwicke, *Twilight* (Summit Entertainment, 2008).

²⁶³ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813; New York, NY: HarperTeen, 2009); Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847; New York, NY: HarperTeen, 2009); William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1600; New York, NY: HarperTeen, 2011), William Shakespeare and Jacqueline Ritten, *Romeo and Juliet* (1597; New York, NY: HarperTeen, 2009).

²⁶⁴ It's perhaps even more scandalous that HarperCollins is the publisher of this series, since they were able to profit on Little, Brown's *Twilight* readership and cover recognition--a large incentive in an economy where traditional publishers are striving to stay afloat.

twenty-first-century paratext not only transforms the audience of the Victorian novel, but the genre and historicity of it as well--all of which are inherently embedded in what and how the text means at any given moment. Ultimately, I hope to suggest that the economic motivations inherent in publishing companies, as well as an awareness of contemporary reading habits, largely transform, limit, and guide how we read the canon today. Furthermore, contemporary publishing limitations and successes are working to shift and challenge the generic constraints surrounding Victorian novels and culture.²⁶⁵

HarperTeen's growing collection of *Twilight*-esque classics structures the connection between twenty-first-century genre fiction and Victorian novels/Shakespearean plays in ways that are far more complex than simply adding some well-loved classics next to the young-adult displays in bookstores.²⁶⁶ The connection to Meyer's saga is established not only by removing the material conventions constraining canonical literature, but by rebranding the western canon as a young adult one--a connection that both merges and dismantles the historical and generic boundaries between the texts. Each of the HarperTeen novels and plays are adorned with red and white symbolically isolated images on a black background--a cover combination that the *Twilight* series is well known for utilizing. The font used for both the author's name and the book's title are identical--placing Stephanie Meyer's authority on par with the likes of Austen, Brontë, and Shakespeare. Ironically, the most striking difference between the two is that the

²⁶⁵ For more information on contemporary publishing habits, see John B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*, Second Edition (2010; Plume, Penguin Group, 2012). Not only does Thompson strategically analyze the altered landscape in big publishing within the last half century, he also famously calls attention to the fact that publishing companies are major "cultural mediators and arbitrators of quality and taste" (8).

²⁶⁶ While Shakespeare is not a Victorian author, the inclusion of him in this canon is particularly poignant given that Victorian iterations of Shakespeare align with so much of how we understand his works today--in a way, coupling Shakespeare with Austen and Brontë continues the work of coupling Victorian novels with twenty-first-century ones.

Twilight novel cover classifies the text as “The #1 New York Times Bestseller”—a sentiment not mimicked on the covers of Meyer’s canonical peers. This simple marketing tactic, often employed to garner more sales from the cultural prestige associated with being a “bestseller” develops a complicated hierarchy between Meyer and the rest of the western canon her novels deliberately engage with within the HarperTeen collection—one in which her ethos is given slightly more reception-based power. In this sense, the HarperTeen *Twilight* editions sell so well precisely because Meyer’s Saga does—her cultural economy amplifies and carries over to the cultural economy of the western classics.

And, just as the cover matter and font of Meyer’s saga is mirrored on the HarperTeen’s editions, the font of the actual novels and plays also mirrors the aesthetic sizing and spacing commonly found in YA literature (an aesthetic that is vastly different from the tightly cramped typography found in the more academic versions of the same texts). While the text of the plays and novels aren’t altered, these simple stylistic and visual changes to the font, spacing, and margins, help to reaffirm HarperTeen’s claim that these western canonical works belong in the same category as young adult novels. At the same time, these simple stylistic choices to the font and formatting help to make these texts far more accessible to a readership who might be unaccustomed to or intimidated by reading such culturally prestigious texts.

While it might seem at first that HarperCollins is reaching by comparing Meyer’s work to such long renowned novels and plays, the publishing company chose texts that are explicitly discussed and engaged with in the *Twilight* novels at some point, with Meyers drawing specific connections between moments in her novels that mimic or interact with moments in the canon. HarperCollins published this series as a tribute to a fictionalized “Edward and Bella” reading list, going so far as to place a “Bella & Edward’s Favorite Book” stamp of approval right on the

cover of *Wuthering Heights*, and claiming that *Twilight* is one of Juliet's favorite movies during a "What if Romeo and Juliet lived now and had a Facebook?" segment in Shakespeare's play (14).²⁶⁷ The latter choice is particularly interesting not least of all because it disrupts traditionally linear readings of texts and intertextuality, but also because it classifies the fictional character of Juliet as one who has similar reading tastes to the HarperTeen and *Twilight* target demographics. Connecting characters like Bella, Cathy Earnshaw, and Juliet also helps to confirm another common convention across the centuries: they all feature young adult female protagonists, suggesting that these canonical texts have always been for a YA market, they are simply reclaiming that position and fanbase in the twenty-first century.

These covers and paratextual materials do more than simply generate profit; they also transform how contemporary audiences engage with canonical works of the past. Teenage readers who pick up these HarperTeen books experience the novels and plays through a lens informed by *Twilight*. In this sense, the reading history of the audiences targeted by this book campaign, in conjunction with the series' paratextual materials, inform the meaning of these texts written centuries ago, changing how and what they mean to young contemporary readers. While it is unlikely that publishing companies are intentionally engaging with textual studies scholarship, these twenty-first century editions embody D.F. McKenzie's insightful call to action for scholars of the book to think about how "forms effect meaning" while considering "not only the technical but social processes of their transmission."²⁶⁸ For McKenzie, a book's meaning is transformed and informed by the varying social constraints placed on it--something that develops and changes over time with different motivations. In this sense, he argues that meaning:

²⁶⁷ Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 14 in "Extras" section.

²⁶⁸ D.F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13.

accounts for non-book texts, their physical forms, textual versions, technical transmission, institutional control, their perceived meanings, and social effects...For any history of the book which excluded study of the social, economic, and political motivations of publishing, the reasons why texts were written and read as they were, why they were rewritten and redesigned, or allowed to die, would degenerate...and never rise to a readable history.²⁶⁹

These *Twilight*-friendly editions of canonical works represent some of the key motivations McKenzie addresses by recontextualizing and republishing them in different social and economic spheres. In this sense, the covers, as well as the ‘extra’ paratext in the form of Q&A’s with the characters, *Cosmopolitan*-style quizzes, author pseudo-biographies, fictionalized social-media accounts, etc. frame the texts in a way that changes how audiences are able to engage with the western canon.

In determining how audience and genre become situated in the HarperTeen edition of Brontë’s novel, it is useful to compare it to an edition which would never find itself stacked in the YA section of a bookstore: the 2009 reissue of the Oxford World’s Classics edition. This series from the Oxford University Press distributes editions of the widely recognized British canon--placing in a list amongst names like Austen, Darwin, Dickens, Eliot, Hardy, and Wilde (a list which is printed at the end of the novel as a way to both contextualize and enforce the author’s literary importance while encouraging consumers to purchase the other texts in the series).²⁷⁰ The paratext both emerges from and feeds Brontë’s place in the canon. The text of the novel is also framed by a lengthy introduction, a note on the text, select bibliography, chronology of Brontë, genealogical table, explanatory notes, and appendices. The consumer of this book

²⁶⁹ McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, 13.

²⁷⁰ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Edited by Ian Jack (1847; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009).

does not simply purchase *Wuthering Heights*, but a hefty selection of information that works to historicize the novel while providing resources for further research. The Oxford World's Classics edition serves a dual purpose--it can be found stacked on 'classic literature shelves' in the bookstore for 'average' consumers, as well as in undergraduate classrooms for "scholarly" consumers. In either case, this edition of the novel explicitly engages with Brontë's established cultural and literary value, while situating her as an author of "past" importance which merits present admiration and study.

In the HarperTeen edition, however, Brontë's novel is enthusiastically stripped from the intimidating category of "high literature" and moved instead into the more accessible realms of genre fiction--and, more specifically, young adult fiction. This edition comes stocked with wildly different paratext from the Oxford book. Here, extras include "QUIZ: Are You Destined for Tumultuous Love, Like Catherine and Heathcliff?" (modeled after the quizzes that can be found in popular teen magazines), "Ingredients for a Gothic Romance" (a list that focuses primarily on romance--not *romantic*--elements that mirror most paranormal romance novels today), "10 Things You Didn't Know About Emily Brontë" (a rudimentary list that covers her family, literary pursuits, and death), and "What if Catherine and Heathcliff Lived Now and Were on Facebook?" (a segment in which the characters answer questions about their romantic interests, likes, and dislikes). This material has no interest in embedding Brontë in scholarly or historical discourse, but instead forges a social relationship between the gothic romance author and the contemporary romance reader. This bridges the often intimidating gap between nineteenth-century fictional characters and teenagers, making the novel potentially more approachable and consumable. It is perhaps Brontë's association with the 'gothic romance' period that makes it easy for publishers to conflate her work with the contemporary paranormal romance genre. The

fact that the term ‘romance’ operates on two separate discursive circles (one referring to a historical time period and genre, the other referring to the plot or content of the story) becomes slippery or ambivalent.

That *Wuthering Heights* makes the transition from a novel about nineteenth-century social relations, revenge, and problematic love to one about young people caught in a forbidden romance is evident from how the different publishers summarize the text. The Oxford University Press back cover states the following about the novel:

Discovered on the streets of Liverpool, Heathcliff is rescued by Mr. Earnshaw and taken to the remote Yorkshire farmhouse of Wuthering Heights. Earnshaw’s daughter Catherine rapidly forms a passionate attachment to him, but when Catherine’s brother takes over the Heights, Heathcliff is lowered to the position of a barely-tolerated farmhand. When Catherine decides to marry the refined Edgar Linton instead, Heathcliff turns revenger. He determines to degrade not only those who sought to degrade him, but their children after them.

Wuthering Heights is one of the most famous love stories in the English language. It is also, as the Introduction to this edition explores, one of the most post revenge narratives. Its ingenious narrative structure, vivid evocation of landscape, and the extraordinary power of its depiction of love and hatred have given it a unique place in English literature. This edition reproduces the authoritative Clarendon text, with revised and expanded notes and a selection from the poems of Emily Brontë.²⁷¹

While the “passionate attachment” between Heathcliff and Catherine is mentioned in this

²⁷¹ Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Oxford University Press, back cover.

passage, the blurb focuses just as much on the book's geography, formal qualities of the text, and the delicate balance between love and revenge. Ultimately, the affective experiences of the main characters are couched within social commentary--the level of drama associated with the contemporary romance genre is notably quelled at best, absent at worst. Instead, the primary value of the novel stems from its "carefully choreographed plot," "ingenius narrative structure," and character developments like "self-knowledge" and "true understanding." These phrases help to guide our reading of *Wuthering Heights* as a conventionally analytical one. We are asked to read Brontë's text deeply which, in this case, means reading it with an awareness of the text's ingenuity, couched in its historicity. Ultimately, the reference to the Clarendon authoritative text and paratextual information contained alongside that text work to confirm Brontë's literary and cultural value, not introduce it; and while the blurb alludes to Heathcliff's 'love' for Catherine, it is viewed through a lens of hatred and revenge, not romance, and certainly not something typically confined to the aisles of young adult literature. Indeed, the romantic elements of Brontë's novel are often critiqued by both academic and popular readers in the twenty-first century--oftentimes with as much fervor as the novel's nineteenth-century readers who largely found the characters and plot to be morally reprehensible and certainly not something to aspire to.

The HarperTeen edition of *Wuthering Heights*, however, completely reframes the novel's focus and informs and restructures how it produces meaning:

I cannot live without my life!

I cannot live without my soul!

When Catherine and Heathcliff's childhood friendship grows into something so much more, what ensues is one of the greatest love stories of

all time. Even as fate conspires against them and passion consumes them, nothing can keep Catherine and Heathcliff apart. Not even death . . . for their forbidden love is unlike any other.

Emily Brontë's masterpiece remains as compelling and thrilling as ever. Beautifully presented for a modern teen audience, this is the must-have edition of a timeless classic.²⁷²

It is difficult to believe that these two descriptions are written in summation of the 'same' novel. This edition doesn't just situate romance as the primary conflict in the novel, but as the only one. More obviously, it situates this romance in the exact paradigm *Twilight* is situated within. In fact, if we were to replace 'Catherine' with 'Bella,' and 'Heathcliff' with 'Edward,' this plot synopsis would be interchangeable with several installments of the *Twilight Saga*.²⁷³ Thanks to the HarperTeen framing, the young adult reader is able to draw connections between the Victorian novel and the twenty-first-century young adult one. Both texts revolve around the chaotic passions between the main characters with relationships that are challenged by social pressures. The mention that "not even death" has the power to keep Catherine and Heathcliff apart is particularly clever, compelling, and transferable, given that Edward Cullen is indeed an undead vampire--an affliction he initially uses to push Bella away, but one that he inevitably succumbs to. Indeed, Edward's violence is particularly significant and poignant, given that he must use

²⁷² Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, HarperTeen, back cover.

²⁷³ Indeed as argued in Janice A Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984; Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), the formulaic and repetitive nature of romance novels is part of the appeal for romance readers. Acknowledging the similar conventions across the HarperTeen classics would appeal, rather than deter, readers of genre fiction (29). Radway argues that the genre's "extraordinary profit figures convincingly demonstrate that books do not necessarily have to be thought of and marketed as unique objects but can be sold regularly and repetitively to a permanent audience on the basis of brand-name identification alone" (39). In many ways, her argument anticipates the marketing choices of publishers like HarperTeen.

every ounce of his willpower not to give in to his supernatural desire to destroy Bella--a level of control that Heathcliff never maintains when fighting against his abusive disposition. Ultimately, however, this rebranding of *Wuthering Heights* romanticizes and idolizes the domestic violence littering Brontë's plot and ties an unwelcome link to some of the more dubious undertones of the *Twilight* media franchise, which ultimately hinges on an older man taking advantage of a teenage girl and leading her into a world filled with violence and death.

Interestingly, the HarperTeen version does not once mention Heathcliff's problematic revenge narrative, despite the fact that Catherine notoriously dies rather early in the book and the second half is devoted almost entirely to his attempts at terrorizing the next generation of characters. This is perhaps unsurprising given that many contemporary adaptations of the Victorian classic either ignore or displace the fact that one of the protagonists leaves the narrative at so early a moment.²⁷⁴ However it is troubling to find twenty-first readers romanticizing the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff, given how very problematic it is and always has been--a connection that both novels again share, as many critics have spoken out against Edward's often obsessive and possessive control over Bella. Despite her rather early death, however, Catherine is given just as much face time in this blurb as Heathcliff and is even mentioned first in the introduction of the story. Their comparable screen time is compelling

²⁷⁴ See William Wyler, *Wuthering Heights* (The Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1939). This film largely set the precedent for how contemporary readers and viewers engage with Emily Brontë's classic. Wyler essentially ignores the second half of Brontë's novel, using his adaptation to instead focus on the "love story" that predominantly informs how Brontë's reception has been shaped. Most film adaptations after Wyler took a similar approach, making *Wuthering Heights* an excellent example of how adaptations can reshape how the popular imagination understands, engages with, and assesses the generic constraints of canonical texts. While it can be argued that most twentieth- and twenty-first century adaptations of the novel have excluded the second half due to complications with using a multi-generational narrative structure, *Wuthering Heights'* contemporary associations within the romance genre seem to suggest that the generic reframing is equally important in these decisions.

considering that Oxford edition blurb frames the entire summary through Heathcliff's experiences of Catherine's choices. This focus on the female role in the novel is particularly relevant to the YA genre, given that the HarperTeen editions cater specifically to a young female audience. By focusing on Catherine's role in the story first and giving her as much representation and agency as Heathcliff, the backmatter in the HarperTeen edition helps to reframe *Wuthering Heights* in a way that better aligns with the style and structure of *Twilight*. This is especially relevant given the fact that Meyer's novels are written almost entirely from the perspective of Bella Swan. By framing Catherine as the primary protagonist, HarperTeen subtly suggests that her reflection of Bella is mirrored throughout the plot and point of view as well. Of course much of this connective work is accomplished through the front matter crest that claims that *Wuthering Heights* is the *Twilight* couple's favorite novel and, even before the HarperTeen edition, through Bella Swan's frequent comparisons of her relationship with Edward to that of Catherine's relationship with Heathcliff throughout Meyer's third installment.²⁷⁵ Oddly, Bella's constant comparisons to Cathy are either framed with self-loathing that highlights her own perceived failings, or as a passionate comparison to her tumultuous relationship--allusions to Heathcliff's violence and revenge are notably less frequent.

These two texts not only share a common plot, but a 'magical' rhetoric as well. For example, phrases which frame "fate" as something that "conspires against them" and allusions to their love existing in death with the front tagline of "Love Never Dies" all work to embed *Wuthering Heights* in the same magical world that *Twilight* exists in--a world where (non)human interaction is mitigated through supernatural forces beyond the characters' control. This supernatural discourse is strengthened by *Wuthering Heights*' position within the gothic genre--

²⁷⁵Stephanie Meyer, *Eclipse*, Twilight Series (New York, NY: Little, Brown, 2007).

while no supernatural occurrences are explicitly described in Brontë's novel, the mysticism and mystery of the moors invite the comparison. By situating the two novels in the same discourse, and by focusing so completely on the elements of love and romance in *Wuthering Heights*, the publishers of this edition suggest to its audience that *Twilight*'s readership is the same as Brontë's. Indeed, this same discourse and marketing approach is carried out across the entire HarperTeen collection, with covers and blurbs that draw obvious comparisons between the young adult series and several cultural institutions in the western canon.

While the HarperTeen editions have done wonders within their target market, their success is largely contingent on the fact that the *Twilight Saga* was already successful at boosting classics like *Wuthering Heights*' fame on its own. In a 2010 Telegraph article, Harry Wallop points out that the mere mention of *Wuthering Heights* in *Twilight's Eclipse* film helped Brontë's novels "sell 17 million copies around the world and propelled the films to the top of the box office."²⁷⁶ While it can be difficult to place all of the credit on one YA novel and one film adaptation, Wallop points out that in 2005, before the *Twilight* series was published, Brontë's classic sold "8,551 a year in Britain," but after the HarperTeen release, that number skyrocketed to a hefty 34,023 in the year following the 2009 release. Indeed, just five months after the HarperTeen edition was released in the UK, it had sold "nearly twice as many as the traditional Penguin Classic edition, making it Waterstone's bestselling classic."²⁷⁷ The UK and US weren't the only places to see this HarperTeen effect, with a French publisher pointing out that sales of *Wuthering Heights* were up more than 50% following the release.²⁷⁸ This sort of marketing

²⁷⁶ Harry Wallop, "Wuthering Heights Sales Quadruple Thanks to Twilight Effect," *The Telegraph*, www.telegraph.co.uk (April 10, 2010).

²⁷⁷ Alison Flood, "Vampire Endorsement Turns Brontë into Bestseller," *The Guardian* (August 27, 2009), www.theguardian.com/books.

²⁷⁸ Alison Flood, "Twilight's Teen Vampires Boost French Sales of Wuthering Heights," *The Guardian* (March 16, 2009), www.theguardian.com/books.

strategy isn't new. Plenty of publishers release movie-tie ins of popular books once a new film adaptation is set to be released. And these editions often do quite well. In the case of the HarperTeen editions, however, it is perhaps slightly more interesting because books are being marketed on the metaphysically complicated guidance of fictional characters--a notion reaffirmed by the "Bella and Edward's favorite book" crest found on the 2009 edition of *Wuthering Heights*.²⁷⁹ That fictional characters have a very real power in the recommendation of fictional texts adds a layer of self-aware intertextuality that acknowledges the arbitrary and constantly shifting relationships between the texts we read and the tastes and values that shape how we read them.

This connection between the texts does more than simply increase sales of *Wuthering Heights* however--it also potentially raises *Twilight* to a greater cultural value, by suggesting that it is 'literary,' or at the very least that it shares a readership with Brontë, Austen, and Shakespeare. Meyer's series, which is frequently viewed as 'lowbrow' and young adult, gains a level of prestige by being associated with an author like Brontë (or Shakespeare or Austen). In highlighting the similarities between the two novels, as HarperTeen does, 'Meyer' becomes to 'Brontë' what 'Bella' is to 'Catherine,' elevating the saga to something closer to Brontë's level of cultural prestige (the extent to which this happens successfully is debatable, and there is likely no way to quantify it). In this sense, Brontë's 'depth' or value is not situated within any of the paradigms contemporary critics read her work through, but purely in her cultural value as part of the canon. That the HarperTeen cover alludes to Brontë's novel as a "masterpiece" and "timeless classic" speaks to this association of her depth. This gets revalidated as something more intimate,

²⁷⁹ Ironically, while romance novels are often shunned or shamed for covers that signify 'romance' or 'sex,' in this case, appealing to the romance genre on the cover helps to improve the sales of conventionally 'higher' literary fiction.

when the novel is called “compelling and thrilling”--suggesting that Brontë’s cultural currency stems from her passionate readership and ability to induce the escapist or feverish reading more frequently associated with ‘lowbrow’ genres and readerships. Indeed, words like “compelling” or “thrilling” are far more frequently markers of genre fiction than they are of novels bracketed under the more prestigious umbrella of ‘literature.’ *Wuthering Heights* is not described as intellectual, deep, or critically engaging, but as something that forges a connection between the text and the emotions of its readership--the very thing which gives the *Twilight* Saga its cultural value. Of course, it is important to point out that in raising the status of Meyer, publishers are at risk of possibly “lowering” the status of an author like Brontë, as the young adult genre is still largely considered genre fiction and not ‘literature.’ However, it might be this very grounding of Brontë that makes redefining the text’s literary depth as something bound up in romance easier. It also serves to blur the lines between low and high art by suggesting that depth can be appreciated in both genres, albeit “depth” means something different in each.²⁸⁰

In turning *Wuthering Heights* into a young adult novel, HarperTeen potentially opens up a new way of making the text relevant to the contemporary reader, by giving “lowbrow” fans an entry point into accessing Brontë. When discussing the development of the novel, Nancy

²⁸⁰ The marketing strategies in HarperTeen do more than reclassify *Wuthering Heights* as a young adult romance novel: they gender Brontë’s readers. It’s no secret that the targeted audience for *Twilight* is teenage girls. By suggesting that *Wuthering Heights* is a version of Meyer’s saga, or even one that gave birth to it, it becomes clear that HarperTeen isn’t just aiming for young readers, but young female readers. This is not new, however, as the romance genre has always been marketed as a distinctly female one. That said, it is interesting that once Brontë is calibrated as a “lowbrow” reader, her novels become the product of a strictly female consumer, situating “highbrow” with men and “lowbrow” with women. In many ways, Brontë’s early readers have a lot in common with Meyer’s: while *Wuthering Heights* is undoubtedly a part of many western canons today, it was read primarily by young women when it was published (indeed, many western classics were originally published for a young adult audience) and received almost as much ridicule, scorn, and chastisement as the *Twilight* franchise did upon its release and success.

Armstrong famously argues that in order to develop into an individual, “a character had to harbor an acute dissatisfaction with his or her assigned position in the social world and feel compelled to find a better one” and that once the character became a kind of subject, it became “uniquely capable of reproducing itself not only in authors but also in readers, in other novels, [etc.]”²⁸¹ In this sense, during the novel’s early development, it relied heavily on developing a relationship with its reader, working to create the modern subject and, in turn, be created by the modern subject; the reader’s social discomfort became highlighted and defined through reading about a character’s. By removing a novel like *Wuthering Heights* from isolation in its historical moment and fusing it with a contemporary novel, HarperTeen creates a space where the “dissatisfaction” with a character’s position can become relevant beyond his or her historical moment. In other words, it serves to reforge the bond between text and reader in a way that is more similar to the bond Brontë’s early readers had to her than her contemporary ones. Contemporary readers no longer read to find the “subject” in a character like Catherine, because they already know it is there. In displacing the novel’s timeline, however, this disconnect and predictability becomes easier to overcome.

Though the HarperTeen collection is marketed as a heroic attempt to get young adults to read and enjoy the classics, it does much more than this; the readers don’t engage with the classic versions of the text in the same way that they would if holding the Oxford World’s Classics edition. By restructuring the audience, genre, and historicity of Brontë, the text ‘means’ in a different way. It is in the comparison of the paratext of the HarperTeen editions with the traditional ones, that these new meanings are made clear. By looking at how they encourage and limit readers and readings, it becomes easier “to coordinate the literary with the social: to

²⁸¹ Nancy Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of British Individualism from 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 4, 3.

provide an account of literary texts and practices by reference to the social forces of their production, the social meanings of their formal particulars, and the social effects of their circulation and reception.”²⁸² The actual text of Brontë’s novel, isn’t what fully informs how we use it, or even within which genre we classify it. Instead, this edition requires that we consider how both the paratext and *Twilight* interact with Brontë’s original story and contemporary reception to it.

In 2013, HarperCollins continued its project of building off the young adult nineteenth-century market, by commissioning a series of modern-day retellings of Jane Austen novels that place Austen’s novels into relatable twenty-first century situations and spaces. Perhaps most compelling is crime writer Val McDermid’s updated take on *Northanger Abbey* (2014), a rewrite which revolves around McDermid’s protagonist consuming contemporary vampire fiction like *Twilight* with as much fervor as Austen’s Catherine Morland consumes gothic classics like Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho*.²⁸³ This particular adaptation not only draws a connection between *Twilight* and Austen, but suggests that Austen’s protagonist is the same type of affective reader as contemporary consumers of young adult literature--the fact that McDermid and

²⁸² James F. English, “Everywhere and Nowhere: The Sociology of Literature After ‘the Sociology of Literature,’” *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): V–XXiii, Viii.

²⁸³ Val McDermid, *Northanger Abbey* (The Borough Press, 2014). First editions of this novel were published with a glowing quote from *Harry Potter*’s J.K. Rowling: “Witty and shrewd, full of romance and skulduggery--I loved it.” This endorsement continues HarperCollins’ (of which The Borough Press is an imprint) work of drawing connective tissue between major young adult franchises and the nineteenth century. This modern retelling finds Cat, a twenty-first-century teenager obsessed with “contemporary vampire romance” novels, hoping to become the heroine of her own novel. Austen’s satire on the gothic becomes a modern satire on *Twilight*. Cat is found at moments reading *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies*, as well as referencing her appreciation for Victorian fanfiction. And, like Austen, McDermid affectionately pokes fun of genre fiction while simultaneously uplifting it (after all, while Catherine Morland takes novels too seriously, the narrator is frequently found bestowing praise on novel reading, a genre frequently ridiculed in her time just as YA fiction is often cast aside in twenty-first century literary culture).

Austen's protagonists consume genre fiction and blur the boundaries between 'low' and 'high' forms of reading contributes to the work that HarperTeen's *Twilight* stylized editions accomplish. At the same time, the writers within this modernized Austen series are all considered 'genre' fiction writers, which furthers the project of aligning canonical Victorian authors of 'literature' with twenty-first-century 'low brow' authors and readers, suggesting that the constraints which define these categories are arbitrary and unstable. In this series of novels, not only does a canonical nineteenth-century author become aligned with contemporary reading habits, but she also becomes rebranded as a young adult author--one who is placed on par with contemporary genre fiction authors in a similar way that Brontë, Austen, and Shakespeare are placed on a level playing with Meyer in the HarperTeen editions.

Not only are Victorian classics updated and brought to the twenty-first century, but there is an increasing tendency for young adult steampunk and fantasy novels to be situated in updated nineteenth-century London. Cassandra Clare, bestselling author of *The Immortal Instruments* series (2007-2014), penned a prequel to her modern-day fantasy series set in Victorian England.²⁸⁴ Not only does this series explore the nineteenth century with a target readership of twenty-first-century young adults, it also anticipates the events of her first series, drawing connections between ideas and characters over a span of two hundred years.²⁸⁵ This prequel trilogy examines how the nineteenth century created the magical and cultural foundations for *The Immortal Instruments* series, all while marrying Clare's well-known fantastical world building with a familiar, albeit altered, nineteenth-century England. At the same time, each chapter of the

²⁸⁴ Cassandra Clare, *The Mortal Instruments*, Book Series (New York, NY: Margaret K McElderry) 2007.

²⁸⁵ For this chapter, I will focus on Cassandra Clare, *Clockwork Angel*, *The Infernal Devices* (New York, NY: Margaret K. McElderry Books) 2010. This is the first book in her *The Infernal Devices*, book series (New York, NY: Margaret K McElderry Books) 2010-2013 series.

prequel trilogy begins with an excerpt from a popular nineteenth-century text, with the main characters frequently referencing penny dreadfuls, nineteenth-century folklore, and popular poets and novelists like Lord Byron and the Brontës. Unsurprisingly, the female protagonist consumes Victorian novels with a fervor, despite being an American immigrant, in a similar fashion that Meyer's Bella Swan voraciously reads the western canon. In one scene the male lead, Will, chastises the female protagonist, Tessa, for choosing the likes of Dickens, Braddon, and Collins and hands her a fictional *Codex* of the realm's magical rules. In doing this, he not only reminds us that these now canonical authors were once the authors of sensational genre fiction, but that the young adult novel in the reader's hand is capable of producing meta-texts that are more 'highbrow' and pragmatic than these cultural institutions in the history of the novel.²⁸⁶ This scene also elevates Clare's cultural prestige and continues the work of dismantling and complicating literary timelines through intertextuality. That Clare eventually published *The Shadowhunter's Codex* (2013) only heightens the complicated work of this temporal disruption.²⁸⁷

The nineteenth century is a particularly fitting setting for Clare's series, in that the generic constraints of twenty-first century fantasy and science fiction are largely grounded in Victorian monster culture--a connection made clear through references to vampires like Varney and Lord Ruthven. Clare's *The Infernal Devices* trilogy is particularly interesting because while it occurs temporally before her *The Mortal Instruments* series, it is written and published after the success of the contemporary fantasy. This spinoff from a twenty-first century fantasy inherently draws a link between the world of contemporary YA culture and the Victorian period, while simultaneously problematizing the linear historicity of those events in a way that

²⁸⁶ Clare, *Clockwork Angel*, 88.

²⁸⁷ Cassandra Clare and Joshua Lewis, *The Shadowhunter's Codex* (Simon & Schuster: 2013).

complicates how we read across the centuries. Clare concludes *Clockwork Angel* with “A Note on Tessa’s London” and “A Note on the Poetry,” two sections which clarify the decisions behind the geographical staging for the novel while pointing out inconsistencies between the “real and the unreal, the famous and the forgotten.”²⁸⁸ While it’s not unusual for historical romance authors to negotiate between fact and fiction, it is compelling that a fantasy author attempts to situate a genre, and one whose basis in unreality and fantasy is generally the largest component, in elements of the “real.” Just as the HarperTeen editions’ paratext worked to draw a connection between canonical fiction and the fantastical, here a fantasy author draws one to ‘known’ elements of the nineteenth-century.

Kerri Maniscalco’s *Stalking Jack the Ripper* (2016) is another, more recent, example of a young adult neo-Victorian series that plays with both known and fictional elements of nineteenth-century culture.²⁸⁹ Maniscalco’s bestselling first novel follows the protagonist Audrey Rose as she works alongside her uncle and his mentee to uncover the infamous Jack the Ripper killings in East End London. Like with Clare, this novel concludes with an author’s note that clarifies which liberties were taken, while situating the novel within as much known evidence of the case as possible. Throughout the novel, the text is written alongside multimedia inclusions of actual nineteenth-century news clippings, including images of the well-known Ripper letters submitted to London police, photographs of prominent and relevant British establishments, and illustrations of nineteenth-century anatomy sketches. The inclusion of found texts, mixed with the fact that very little is actually known and verified about the Jack the Ripper incidents, makes

²⁸⁸ Clare, *Clockwork Angel*, 477-9

²⁸⁹ Kerri Maniscalco, *Stalking Jack The Ripper* (New York, NY: Jimmy Patterson Books, 2016). Maniscalco’s book was the first chosen title in James Patterson’s new children’s book imprint of Little, Brown and Company (the same publishing company that published the *Twilight* series). It’s an excellent example of a well-known, best selling genre-fiction author functioning as gatekeeper and taste-maker in a new wave of young adult literature.

the content ideal for revisionist writing and fictional play. Ultimately, the text becomes a bit of a genre mash-up in that the conclusion finds the Ripper embarking on a Frankensteinian project, mirroring science fiction with the real in a way that isn't completely different from how H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and *The Invisible Man* (1897) explored serial killers from the veil of ill-used science.

Like most neo-Victorian works, both Clare and Maniscalco function through reparative reading and rewrite nineteenth-century history with twenty-first century tastes in mind. In Clare's novels female shadowhunters fight, hold positions of authority, and wear pants and, in Maniscalco's, the main character spends her time dissecting Jack's victims alongside her uncle as he performs the autopsies and skirting the conventions of her gender and class; in both novels, those who align with nineteenth-century positions on class, race, and gender are often villainized. This practice is found frequently in adaptations that rewrite historical periods with tastes and values different from our own, as a way to ease the guilt and negotiate with the problematic nostalgia of reproducing a period that spent little time lamenting the treatment of disenfranchised populations. It is, perhaps, not unusual that a marginalized and new twenty-first-century young adult genre sees its historical other in the nineteenth-century; nor is it surprising that it draws contemporary readers and tastemakers to the transforming trajectory of the Victorian novel. By forging and dismantling connections across centuries, contemporary young adult texts offer a way to warn us away from making similar mistakes when it comes to literary value systems and marginalized reading habits.

Conclusion

In November of 2015, retail-giant Amazon opened its first physical bookstore in Seattle, Washington. Unlike most conventional brick-and-mortar bookstores, Amazon Books is arranged to showcase the relationships between books and their reading communities: books are placed on shelves so that their covers are facing the consumer; each book has a frequently-updated amazon reader rating, often with a rhetorically savvy quote from a consumer or staff review; the displays change often and reflect current buying patterns on Amazon's website; and prices aren't fixed but require constant scanning on the part of the consumer to watch as prices shift in real time, just as frequently as they do online.

Despite this, what is most compelling and relevant to my work is the fact that shelving categories are arranged in ways that deliberately ask consumers and readers to put books into conversation with each other. Rather than merely being separated by arbitrary genres, the store's products are separated by equally (but consciously) arbitrary displays.²⁹⁰ There are some which deliberately privilege Amazon's own marketable goods and services: "Unputdownable: Books Kindle Readers Finished in 3 Days or Less," "Highly Quotable: Books Most Frequently Highlighted by Kindle Customers," and "Highly Rated Fiction on Goodreads." Most notable for the trends discussed throughout my dissertation, however, are the categories that directly confront the instability of genre and the malleability of historical context: "Perfect Pairs: Fiction and Nonfiction to Read Together" (a temporary shelf that placed Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815) alongside Jen Chaney's *As If!: The Oral History of Clueless as Told by Amy Heckerling and the Cast and Crew* (2015)), "The Reading Life: Highly Rated Books About Books" (where historical

²⁹⁰ It's important to point out, however, that while the displays appear random, they are not; Amazon's algorithm-guided marketing techniques are just as informed by value systems and formations of power (in this case, consumer activity) as genre construction is.

fiction, romance novels, and nonfiction share shelf space), and “The History of Things” (a section that asks readers to consider the relationship between books about Beanie Babies and books about the atomic bomb).

While these sections are all temporary, Amazon Books constantly features the ever-changing, website-inspired shelves of “If You Liked X, You’ll Love Y.” This organizational technique is influenced by online buying habits but still ultimately encourages consumers to consider the intertextual nature of reading books in the digital age, where books are placed in conversation with each other, rather than read in closed isolation. Most relevant to Chapter Four of my dissertation is the transient shelf that informed consumers that if they liked Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, then they would love (note, a stronger word than ‘like’) *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet* (2014) (a novelized adaptation of the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, itself a YouTube adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*), Whit Stillman’s *Love & Friendship: In Which Jane Austen’s Lady Susan Vernon is Entirely Vindicated* (2016) (a book that inspired the 2016 film and which was originally adapted from *Lady Susan*; the book also features Austen’s original novella with Stillman’s annotations), and Claire Tomalin’s *Jane Austen: A Life* (2007) (a ‘biography’ that hyperbolizes Austen’s romantic life). Notably, this selection of four books asks consumers to think about Austen in terms of her reception; her novels are placed alongside contemporary adaptations of her life and adaptations-of-adaptations of her books--a complicated circle of influence that makes it difficult (and, often, almost impossible) to draw the lines between Austen’s novels and their complicated reception history; indeed, her novels are read differently because they are often read through the lens of this reception history.²⁹¹

²⁹¹ There is a robust and extensive critical work that examines the hermeneutics of reception. In addition to adaptation scholars discussed in Chapter Four, and reader response and reception theorists discussed in the introduction and Chapter One see: Stuart Hall, “Encoding/decoding,” In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79* (Routledge, 2003) 117-

While inherently tied to economic interests, the Amazon Books franchise is particularly compelling as a reminder that questions about readers, reception, and systems of value are tied up in ideological formations of power--the very thing my dissertation explores. These displays are constructed to privilege reading communities, but also to help produce and quantify them. At the time of this writing (in 2019), Amazon now has 22 locations across the country selling physical books alongside Kindle e-readers, with plans to open more in the very near future. While traditional bookstores are rapidly closing, Amazon is perhaps the only retailer to be experiencing a rapid expansion in the physical book-selling industry. This suggests that marketing techniques that focus on fan culture and reception theory (as discussed in Chapters Four and Five) are thriving; but it also demonstrates how twenty-first-century publishing culture works to reframe readers' relationships with texts through the lens of reception and intertextuality--framing that mimics (and potentially influences) contemporary scholarly tastes--while frequently challenging historical contexts and boundaries. At the same time, Amazon and contemporary publishing companies reflect and produce both subversive and conservative hermeneutics of reading and ways of understanding popular reading cultures, just as twenty-first-century scholars do the same.

Questions about how we define 'literary' taste and value are just as pressing today as they were over two centuries ago. Rather than focusing on a single period of time or a single set of texts, this dissertation works to trace epistemological trends. Because of this, my approach is

27; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe* (1992; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Robert Darnton, "First Steps Toward a History of Reading," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23.1 (1986), 5-30; André Lacocque and Paul Ricœur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); D.F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13.

neither linear nor exhaustive, but instead weaves lines of connection and reflection between the reading cultures of today and those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Chapter One demonstrates, the relationship between affect and readers is as compelling and contentious a topic to twenty-first-century readers as it was to those over 200 years ago. Scholarly work such as Jan Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984), Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), and Deidre Lynch's *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (2014) reveals the growing investment in understanding the intersections of genre, class, gender, and affect in scholarly circles. While few people today are likely concerned with the novel's ability to corrupt female readers like eighteenth-century Antipamelist were, there are still mirrored concerns about genre fiction and new forms of media. One need only read the headlines that draw connections between videogames and violence to recognize the alarmist trends of 'new media' in the eighteenth century, or the obsessive critique of E.L. James's *50 Shades of Grey* (2011) for being corruptible 'mommy porn' to see that gendered formations of power are still used to delineate generic value. Perhaps in recognizing the fears and inconsistencies of our past selves, we will make our own more visible. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anxieties are so compelling because they mirror our own quite strongly--their urgency is ours.

At the same time, twenty-first-century publishing culture is experiencing a monumental structural shift on par with that of the nineteenth-century industrialized printing press. The surge in e-readers and self-published books in the twenty-first-century is challenging the traditional publishing and taste-making (or 'gatekeeping') systems in the literary world in ways that feel as new or challenging to normative generic tastes as the novel likely seemed to the poem in the nineteenth century. An examination of nineteenth-century reading culture, however, reveals that

self-publishing is not new to the literary field of production (just as the ‘novel’ was not new to Victorians); nor are the fears that mass-produced fiction will muddy the pools of ‘high’ culture. Today’s self-published novels are released quickly, episodically, and with little capital or time spent on editing and polishing. In contrast to traditional publishing practices, self-published books are often created in a do-it-yourself fashion so that they can be consumed passionately by the masses. In this sense, self-publishing can be read as a return to the nineteenth-century penny dreadful model--a return that relishes in affective reading and an affective readership (indeed, it is perhaps this brazen embrace of impassioned reading that puts self-publishing at odds with some scholarly communities and more traditionally ‘literary’ endeavors).

How we read and how we use books is constantly evolving--and the scholarly community is not immune to this constant shaping and reshaping. *Aurora Leigh* functions as a perfect example of this--demonstrating how important framing is in constructions of meaning. Barrett Browning’s text was valued primarily for occupying the space of ‘poem’ in the nineteenth century, but today is more frequently appreciated for its complicated relationships with genre and gender dynamics. Just as Aurora sets out to negotiate the reception of her story while she teaches us how to read through her literary value system, contemporary work on the text makes visible how twentieth-century novel theorists continue to shape and influence these readings. At the same time, scholarly readings of *Pamela* and *Shamela* demonstrate how entrenched scholarship can become in a theoretical approach, once that approach becomes a part of a text’s reception. We do not read the eighteenth-century versions of *Pamela* and *Shamela*; instead, we read these texts through the framing of Ian Watt. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century reception theory reveals how ideology and context guide how readers interact with literary objects of study; but it

has been less discussed how scholars are influenced by ideology in their own approaches to artifacts.

As I argue in Chapter Five, nineteenth-century culture has experienced a revival through Neo-Victorian writings and steampunk culture. Compellingly, the site of this revival is found largely in genre fiction today. In many ways, this makes perfect sense: what is twenty-first-century genre fiction, if not emergent from eighteenth-century sensation and gothic fiction, and nineteenth-century horror, fantasy and science fiction? These trends are not teleological or objective, but complexly connected, recycled, and constructed through systemic formations of power and anxiety.

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