

INTRODUCTION

Ethics, Literature, and the Forms of Encounter

Nothing is more fallacious than general laws for human feelings. The web of them is so fine-spun and so intricate that it is hardly possible for the most careful speculation to take up a single thread by itself and follow it through all the threads that cross it. And supposing it possible, what is the use of it? There does not exist in Nature a single unmixed feeling; along with every one of them there arise a thousand others simultaneously, the very smallest of which completely alters the first, so that exceptions on exceptions spring up which reeducate at last the supposed general law itself to the mere experience of a few individual cases.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *The Laocoon* (1766)

The term “intimacy” (from the Latin *intimus*, “most inner”) refers both to what is closely held and personal and to what is deeply shared with others. Intimacy designates the sphere of the inmost, of the private, and also the realm of cherished connection and association. Unexpressed thoughts and feelings are intimate, but my friend is also my intimate. She might have become intimate with a new lover (the euphemism for sexual intercourse is a usage coeval with modern meanings of the term going back to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries) but also confide to me that they are not otherwise intimate with one another. Naming close forms of friendship, familiarity, and erotic entanglement, and also naming an intrinsic psychic inwardness, “intimacy” crystallizes a tension between sharing and enclosing as opposed imaginations of relational possibilities. The term designates, and thus to a degree attests to, a confidence that individuals can and do disclose to one another thoughts, feelings, and experiences, but it also pertains to, and thus intimates the foreboding or wish for, an inward region of irreducible privacy, a fated or perhaps willed withholding. In the habitual confluence of these conflicting convictions, ethical aspirations and epistemological anxieties are always intermingled, nowhere more obviously than in the eighteenth-century theories of moral sentiment—principally “sympathy”—which are the subject of the first part of this book, unless per-

haps in the twentieth-century theories of psychoanalytic “empathy,” which I address directly in the Coda.¹ My use of the term “intimacy” is meant to evoke the persistent tension between a confidence in the possibility of knowing and being known by others and an implicit commitment to existential privacy that is characteristic of these two discourses (each being, in its own period, a cultural locus for reflection on modes of relational experience). At the same time, my use of intimacy is meant to suspend this problematic in order to investigate, without reduplicating, symptomatic conflicts around the term “sympathy” and to hold in abeyance, as far as possible, the ethical and epistemic goal of mutual recognition that is always at stake in the imagination of intimacy as a form of sympathetic insight or achievement.

This is not, then, another book about the cultural and discursive ubiquity of sympathy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but rather an effort to recover the conflicting drives and urgencies involved in thinking about the emotional and cognitive possibilities of shared experience in the period. To consider these possibilities as forms of intimacy, rather than iterations of sympathy, will, I hope, help turn the axis of inquiry away from terms such as “identification,” “imitation,” and “recognition,” all of which presuppose and anticipate precisely what is in question: an end or aim—be it perceptual, affective, or moral—for the contingent, evanescent, multitudinous forms of experience among others. Indeed, antecedent to the sympathetic demand for identification is the seemingly necessary presupposition that two subjectivities come upon one another, finding or failing to find what they have in common. To hold the aim of mutual recognition in suspension is, then, also to set aside the presupposition that determines that aim in advance and to begin to think about the ways that intimacy (at least in its romantic forms) might be generative of both personal and interpersonal experience. Subjectivities may be said to arise and take shape in the realm of encounter—a realm that no one (existentially speaking) ever stands outside of.

Unlike sympathy, intimacy need not, and rarely does, entail a symmetrical relationship between one and another; need not, and rarely does, involve the discovery of similitude between one and another. Yet insofar as intimacy, like sympathy, designates feeling for and with another, it also admits and discloses affective expectations and disappointments—from aversion to self-abasing admiration, from gratitude to resentment, from frustration to fascination—that involve neither mutuality nor reciprocity but that certainly must be counted

among the many “fine-spun and intricate” threads of the web (to borrow Lessing’s metaphor) that bind one to others.

To the degree that it signifies closeness (being close to, involved closely with), intimacy invites a lingering upon the phenomenal fact of proximity between persons—whether sustained over time, as in a familial relationship, or in the fleeting immediacy of an encounter with a stranger. As mere proximity, intimacy is without content: whatever comes to turn bare proximity into intimacy, into the feeling or sense of closeness, is left to be determined by the particular imaginative articulations of relation and encounter found in the works of philosophy, literature, and psychoanalysis brought together here. The irresistible teleology associated with sympathy, which seems inevitably to lead to querulous demands for intersubjective symmetry—be it the perception of similarity, the impression of equality, or the expectation of reciprocity—inevitably passes over or discounts moments and modes of relational experience that fall short of the aim but are not, thereby, failures or breakdowns of relationship—or even, perhaps, ethical or epistemic failures.² Becoming intimate may occasionally take the form of scrupulously mutual recognition, or involve a fantasy of its attainment, or occur only to evanesce in quickly successive and varied moments of social and interpersonal experience. More frequently, more typically, intimacy involves asymmetrical and nonreciprocal forms of relation, attention, and appreciation. And it is principally these forms of intimacy—undetermined by, but not indifferent to, the ideal of mutuality—that receive subtle and sustained attention in the romantic-era writing that occupies the central portion of this book.

The romantic elaboration of mid-eighteenth-century writing on sensibility in general, and sympathy in particular, has been amply demonstrated in scholarship now extending back two decades that has substantially enriched our understanding of how romanticism absorbs rather than supersedes or decisively breaks with Enlightenment culture. In the work of Frances Ferguson, Marshall Brown, Adela Pinch, and Julie Ellison (among others), the philosophical preoccupations and aesthetic forms of the romantic era involve both the persistence and transformation of areas of inquiry vital to the eighteenth century (including sociability, sensation and the senses, representation, and imagination).³ James Chandler’s recent study of the politics of sentiment not only takes for granted the importance of the Enlightenment legacy but also insists on the comparative dimension of that context, the important circulation of texts and ideas between England, France, and Germany, in order to account for the complex and

multivalent connections between aesthetic and political theory in the romantic era.⁴ *Romantic Intimacy* relies and draws upon these nuanced studies, but my particular aim is as much to estrange as to clarify the imbrication of ethics, epistemology, and emotion in the era's imagination of intersubjectivity—to engage with the dynamic, shifting forms of that imagination by amplifying and pressing implications that might be lost under the pressure of constructing a scrupulously contextualized historical narrative.

The claim advanced in this book is that romantic-era literature (represented here by the poetry of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the fiction of Jane Austen) is exceptional in its simultaneous acknowledgment and suspension of the epistemic and ethical demands of sympathy, allowing a backward and forward glance toward certain impasses in Enlightenment thought that recur within psychoanalysis—in particular, the struggle to reconcile ideals of mutual feeling with equally compelling commitments to the idea of an incommunicable core of the self. The transformative romantic inheritance of Enlightenment sentimentalism does not dispel or resolve the paradox of intimacy, but it does so soften the hard opposing edges of solitary inwardness and interpersonal exposure as to make intelligible the notion that “the place where we live” (in the terms of one psychoanalyst) is “alone and yet in the presence of the other.”⁵ Whether this being-alone-together can be understood as holding relational possibilities that include, rather than evade, an ethics of recognition is a question that arises repeatedly and variously in the romantic-era texts at the center of this study.

SENTIMENTALISM

AND THE IMMEDIACY OF SYMPATHY

Among the most important terms in eighteenth-century British ethics, “sympathy” is at once ubiquitous and conceptually unstable. The task of estranging us from sympathy need not involve the discovery or incorporation of new material, but it does involve a willingness to resist imposing theoretical coherence prematurely. Even though identification, for example, is almost always associated with sympathy, the meanings and implications of both terms depend on unsettled and unsettling questions about perception, cognition, and feeling. Does sympathy presuppose identification, or is it synonymous with and simultaneous to identification, or is identification the effect of sympathetic feeling? Any effort to establish the relationship between identification and sympathy given this insta-

bility risks assuming that sympathy must entail a form of identification, when it is that very requirement that bears investigation. In my own return to sympathy in eighteenth-century philosophy (in the first three chapters of this book), I am less concerned with the ways identification is imagined to occur between persons than I am with the difficulties, yearnings, and hopes that shape this possibility into a psychological preconception and an ethical demand. Identification is to sympathy what “formal unity” and “crystalline purity” are to actual language for Ludwig Wittgenstein—a “preconceived idea” that can be removed only by rotating the “axis of reference” of our examination around “the fixed point of our real need.”⁶ In the terms of this study, the “problem” of sympathy may not be its failure to provide an adequate or satisfying account of identification but its exposure of the disquietudes shaping our demand for such an account.

Arguing against the egoistic premises of Hobbesian psychology, philosophers of moral sentiment such as Anthony Ashley Cooper (Third Earl of Shaftesbury), Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith confidently adduce sympathy as the self-evident ground of social virtues, the affective root of “fellow feeling,” “benevolence,” and “humanity” (as an adjective). But just as Thomas Hobbes’s hypothesis of an aggressive, relentless struggle for self-preservation driven by mutual fear is derived from a radically individualistic or atomistic theory of mind, so too the sentimentalist hypothesis of an instinctive sympathy binding individuals to one another requires epistemic grounding. Although egoism and sentimentalism present straightforwardly opposed views of basic human inclinations with far-ranging ramifications for the political and moral theories linked to them, it is vital to recognize that sentimentalism evolves within the same dominant empiricist paradigm of mind and psychology proposed by Hobbes and influentially elaborated by John Locke. Consequently, insofar as identification is the irreducible sympathetic insight—the other is like me—sentimentalist writing must imagine other human beings as exceptional objects of knowledge, somehow exempt from the mediations of sense, impression, perception, and ideation that split all other objects into (inaccessible) essences and (frequently unreliable) appearances.

The explicit moral interest of the sentimental defense of “human nature” against the indictment of egoism obscures the inveterate, recurrent, and variously ineffectual efforts to account for sympathy as an epistemological problem. In his important early twentieth-century study of sympathy, the phenomenologist Max Scheler begins by observing that “any kind of rejoicing or pity presupposes,

in principle, some sort of knowledge of the fact, nature, and quality of experience in other people, just as the possibility of such knowledge presupposes, as its condition, the existence of other conscious beings.⁷ Scheler's presupposition—"knowledge of the fact, nature, and quality of experience in other people"—underlies eighteenth-century theories as well, though it is also, crucially, unarticulated. Indeed, its articulation would introduce a kind of conceptual stutter, interrupting the affective *immediacy* that the sentimentalists typically emphasize. Francis Hutcheson, for example, writes of irresistible benevolent inclination as a "gravitational" pull toward others, and Hume imagines the urgency of sympathetic response as a swift, impulsive, thoughtless "flight" toward the other.⁸ "No sooner are actions viewed, no sooner the human affections and passions discerned (and they are most of them as soon discerned as felt)," writes Shaftesbury, "than straight an inward eye distinguishes and sees the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable, apart from the foul, the odious, or the despicable."⁹ Discernment of others' affections arises effortlessly and instantly, by force of attraction (Hutcheson), by instinctive transport (Hume), by the supplemental sense of an "inward eye" (Shaftesbury). Even though such representations circumvent epistemological reflection, foreclosing questions about the reliability of perception and sense impressions that so preoccupy contemporaneous theories of knowledge, such preemptions do not so much dispel as displace the troubling implications of empiricism.

Sentimentalism attempts to shield the realm of intersubjectivity from the corrosive scrutiny directed at the inanimate things that typically figure as exemplary objects in empirical investigation of knowledge. The elaborate analysis of mental operations in Locke, for example, destabilizes the most straightforward experiential certainties. My child has left her toy ball in the hallway; all I "really" see (according to Locke) is a flat circle, and I infer its three-dimensional roundness. After putting the ball back in the toy box, I return to the books and papers on my desk; they "disappeared" from my sight when I turned away, but I presume their continued existence.¹⁰ (Of course, entirely omitted from Locke's account, and of no value to his analysis of cognition, are the emotional contexts and cumulative experiences that embed the ball and the paper and the books within a dwelling I share. The ball I see now, for example, involves the habit of picking up after a child that, with the passage of time, leads to shrugging acceptance or ambivalent frustration at the persistent presence of objects underfoot. I return to the books and papers, ready, and sometimes unable, to take them up again

after interruptions that I wish were merely matters of perceptual discontinuity.) Although the conclusions of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* are not what Locke would admit to calling skeptical, a profound concession to skepticism is granted in his conclusion that our untroubled confidence in the existence of these ordinary material phenomena amounts only to *probability*, not certainty. If such an analysis estranges the ordinary, then the same can be said of sentimental certainty about sympathy. Hume, for example, imagines intersubjective accessibility as a harmonious transmission of feeling—“all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature”—and a play of mutual reflection—“the minds of all men are mirrors to one another.”¹¹ Such descriptions of how readily we discern one another’s thoughts and feelings veer wildly toward certainty at precisely those points where we are, ordinarily, most liable to question our impressions and find ourselves most vulnerable to possible disjunctions between perception and judgment. Skepticism and sympathy are thus bound in a strangely complementary structure in eighteenth-century philosophical discourse, whereby the first generates an excessive anxiety about the accuracy and reliability of our apprehension of things and the second presumes an improbable confidence about our intimacy with other persons.

The confidence of sentimentalism and the anxiety of empiricism seem inversely related to their objects. Is it too much to suggest that a poem like Wordsworth’s “Strange Fits of Passion” dramatizes an awareness of this peculiar inversion?¹² Making his way to his lover’s cottage, the rider holds to the constancy of a visible object: “Upon the moon I fixed my eye” (9); “all the while, my eyes I kept / On the descending moon” (19–20). Sure of his way over “paths so dear to me” (12), he proceeds through the orchard and atop the hill until “behind the cottage roof / At once the bright moon dropped” (23–24), prompting the lover’s “fond and wayward thought”: “‘O mercy!’ to myself I cried, / ‘If Lucy should be dead!’” (27–28). The moon’s sudden disappearance, its dropping out of sight, is at once the immediate occasion, and retrospective figuration, of anxiety about the continued existence of the other. The problem of interrupted perception, which in Locke and Hume turns into a question about the persistence or continuity of things in the world, turns instead into a question of affective constancy. The thought “If Lucy should be dead” is “fond and wayward” not only because it is unmotivated by the occasion that prompts it—an errant superstitious association—but because it evokes the passion driving an existential uncertainty that,

the poem proposes, belongs only to those who are fond. In its opening lines the poem invites, indeed insists, that its reader imagine listening in the mood of one who loves (but who, after all, does not love?) if she is to receive or share what it confides: the thought that “will slide / Into a lover’s head” (26–27) is meant for “the lover’s ear alone” (3). In the abrupt economy of its final line, the literal dread of loss—“If Lucy should be dead”—also figuratively implicates something like the passionate conflation of living and loving. Lucy’s love might be dead; my love for her might be dead; her life is dear to me; she is as dear to me as life: such is the waywardness of fondness. And such are the estranging possibilities of passions that, even in such a whimsical form, represent disruptions of the genial emotional certainties of sentimentalism.

Insofar as sentimentalism openly sets itself against a Hobbesian analysis that effectively derives all forms of relational experience from fear, it is not surprising that familiar emotions associated with what we might call intersubjective anxiety—suspicion, dread, wariness, frustration, disappointment—would be unaccounted for in theories propounding the facility and normativity of sympathy.¹³ Nor should it be surprising to find that these are the very emotions evoked in the melodramatic staging of doubts about material objects to which analysis drives the philosopher, and that Stanley Cavell has taught us to appreciate as intelligible versions of achingly familiar misgivings about our relations to others.¹⁴ As straightforward as this philosophical misalignment of affect might seem—where anxiety is relegated to epistemology and confidence to sentimentally based ethics—insistence on the immediate self-evidence of sympathy displaces, but cannot altogether suppress, the affects it disowns.

The very effort to avoid explaining that Schelerian presupposition of sympathetic response—the *knowledge* of others entailed in pitying and rejoicing—only leaves unresolved the question of how feeling for others can be understood as a form of (re)cognition. This impasse cannot be averted—and would only be reduplicated—by imagining sympathy (among other feelings and affects) as a non- or precognitive sense. Although sympathy is conceptualized as a “natural affection” or “instinct” (as in Shaftesbury and Hume), that pseudo-anthropological category always serves and is subordinate to complex, speculative claims about ethical judgment. For all eighteenth-century theories of moral sense, sympathy necessarily entails a valuation of the other (as a fellow human being, as one like me, as one with whom I identify), the ethical implications of which are lost when relational experience is reduced to the automaticity of instinct. “A kind of

mysterious instinct is *supposed* to reside in the soul that instantaneously discerns truth,” observes Mary Wollstonecraft, but “we ought to beware of confounding mechanical instinctive sensations with emotions that reason deepens, and justly terms the feelings of *humanity*” if there is to be any meaningful distinction between virtue and “brutish affection.”¹⁵ In this postrevolutionary critique of sensibility, the thrust of Immanuel Kant’s earlier call for a “pure moral philosophy, completely cleansed of everything that may be only empirical and that belongs to anthropology,” is readily discerned.¹⁶

But the effort to distinguish the ethical substance and obligations of the recognition involved in sympathy from its dubious psychological grounds in affective immediacy still leaves open the question of epistemic discernment. In Shaftesbury, for example, as discussed in Chapter 1, response to others dissolves into a mere mood of responsiveness where what matters is that “our affections and passions are known to us . . . are certain” even if, and regardless of whether or not, “the objects on which they are employed . . . are realities or mere illusions.”¹⁷ Rousseau’s response to the epistemic complexities and contradictions of sentimentalism, which is taken up in Chapter 2, involves a radical and unsustainable effort to invert the psychic inwardness that undermines the correspondence between sympathetic feeling and its ostensible object. The series of utopian works composed in the middle of his career (including *La Nouvelle Héloïse* [1761], *The Social Contract* [1762], and *Emile* [1762]) are unified by the task of imagining conditions that allow no social or existential space for the cultivation of privacy. Rousseau’s communities of mutually transparent, open-hearted confidants and citizens are designed to render sympathetic identification a matter of indubitable fact as well as irresistible feeling. The ethical implications of sympathy (including trust, fidelity, constancy, benevolence) are secured by, but also thereby contingent on, epistemological access to the thoughts and feelings of others—an access Rousseau imagines as constant mutual exposure, a transparency that discloses no hidden depths and effectively hollows out interiority. If this is an unsatisfying account—at once utopian and dystopian—of the conditions for intimacy and the ethical possibilities it might summon, we may also recognize in it an exhaustion of the effort to align knowledge of others with feeling for others.

Insofar as Shaftesbury’s passional self-certainty seems to sever sympathy from its ostensible object, such “affective narcissism” has typically been understood as symptomatic of romantic lyric meditation and, more broadly, of romanticism’s

hypostasis of the imaginative faculty, its aesthetic investment in what we “half create” at the expense of what we “half perceive.” Even Adela Pinch, who openly displaces the familiar charge of egotism so as to explore the “transindividual aspects of emotion” in Wordsworth’s poetry, reverts to analysis of “deep inwardness,” “self-absorption,” and solitary “reverie” in her interpretation of “Strange Fits of Passion.” Pinch lays stress on the self-reflexive “to myself I cried,” suggesting that this penultimate line belies the promise of interpersonal confidence with which the poem begins. “By the end of the poem, the speaker seems to be his only audience,” she notes, suggesting that this “self-quotation” retrospectively turns the “lover’s ear” for whom the tale is destined into “his own ear.”¹⁸ The formal slippage from address to soliloquy is reinforced, thematically, by Wordsworth’s excision of the original final stanza in which the speaker shares his tale with the beloved: “I told her this: her laughter light / Is ringing in my ears: / And when I think upon that night / My eyes are dim with tears.” In omitting this stanza, Wordsworth gives “the speaker the last word . . . by removing [the lover’s voice] from the poem” and thus refocuses attention on a “fundamental uncertainty about the basis for the speaker’s fit.”¹⁹ I agree with Pinch that the excised final lines hint at, as if confirming, the anxious intimation of the lover’s death, though this is by no means the only possibility. The odd temporal convergence of past and present tenses, as if to say her laughter is *still* ringing in my ears (still the lover’s ears?) even as I think back to that night through the dim haze of tears (what De Quincey describes as the “humid light” of the emotions caught in poetry²⁰), might as easily suggest the waning of the passion that motivated this “strange fit,” or the demise of the intimacy that allows for such telling and such laughing, or the passage of time from that night “When she I lov’d, was strong and gay” to this other night when, implicitly, she is no longer so. But is it necessarily the case that, in omitting this ending, Wordsworth removes the lover’s voice? And does the self-quotation (“to myself I cried”) that concludes the final version necessarily exclude, or forget, the audience of lovers the poem initially invites? The answer to these questions is certainly yes if engagement with others is rigidly opposed to (inner) rumination.

What if the poem’s themes of vulnerable confidence and confidential address are developed, refined, and revaluated in its ending rather than overturned? The self-reflexive lines of the final version more fitly uphold the poem’s unity as an occasion of confiding between the lover who speaks and the lover who reads, sustaining the address by omitting reference to the past intimacy of dislo-

sure and response (the “real” relationship between him who told and her who laughed) from which the reader is necessarily excluded. Moreover, the removal of any remotely tenuous connection between the speaker’s anxiety and the reality of the object with which it is concerned effectively shifts the grounds upon which the passion becomes intelligible. The passion is known, is certain (to recall Shaftesbury’s phrasing), but its contextual mooring is neither purely inward in the sense of indifferent to the reality or illusion of its object nor necessarily extrinsic in the sense of being verifiable by the real fate of the object. Rather, the self-absorbing grip of this passion is radically attenuated by the dramatic affective preoccupation with another that it evinces: the “to myself I cried” is less a self-reflexive self-quotation than it is an attestation of the beloved’s power to elicit the subject, to engender passion and its utterance. And insofar as this recollection is meant for the “lover’s ear,” it appeals for its intelligibility to the reader’s silent corroboration and assent to the compulsive and generative force of such psychic preoccupation. Such a reading depends on transmuting rigid oppositions between solitude and sociality, self-reflection and disclosure, inwardness and responsiveness so as not to fall back into sentimentalist impasses over the reality or illusion of feeling for others to which romantic lyric meditation offers a complex response.

INTERPRETING AFFECT, THEORIZING OTHER MINDS, AND THE PRACTICE OF SLOW READING

If eighteenth-century sentimentalism leaves open the question of intersubjective knowledge that it sought to foreclose by recourse to the immediacy of affective insight, it nevertheless bequeaths to later eras (including our own) a powerful valuation of emotion as bound up with and formative of response to others and as constitutive of relational experience. Nor does the particular feeling for others privileged by the term “sympathy” ever become detached from ethical discourses in which recognition of others is imagined in terms of identification, equality, and reciprocity. From this perspective, even Kant’s radical break with sentimentalism remains consistent with the ethical aspirations of that influential school of thought, as the abstract recognition of others as ends in themselves transmutes sympathetic identification into a formalized acknowledgment of essential similitude and equal dignity. What I mean by this is that the epistemic and ethical resonances of sympathy are by no means exhausted or contained by imagining it to be a “mere” feeling. To understand Kantian “respect” (*Achtung*) as

an important variant of sentimental sympathy is not to ignore Kant's distinction between pathological (*pathologisch*, in the literal sense of emotional) and moral incentives but rather to wrest the phenomenal possibilities of recognition from the rigidly nondynamic opposition between feeling and "reason" or "reflection" or "cognition" or (most recently "consciousness" itself) that typically pertains in discussions of sympathy.²¹

Those features of the emotions that Kant excludes from what he calls "moral feeling" (*moralische Gefühl*) (including embodiment, contingency, unreflective inclination, unwilled disposition) are precisely the features highly valued by currently influential theories of affect, so it is worth pausing briefly to address how my own treatment of mood, emotion, and affect—as I find these articulated and evoked in the texts under discussion—differs from these approaches. In a recent, remarkably lucid critical survey of the field, historian of science Ruth Leys points to the consistencies between theoretical claims about affect in the humanities and current conceptualization of the emotions in neuro- and cognitive science. What they share, she argues, "is a commitment to the idea that there is a gap between the subject's affects and its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation . . . such that cognition or thinking come 'too late' for reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings" to shape response.²² Such a perspective, she suggests, can be maintained only by adhering to the "same false opposition between the mind and the body" that is ostensibly challenged by attention to affect as a "visceral," "bodily and autonomic," "non-conscious experience of intensity,"²³ or as an evolutionary inheritance and neurobiological substratum of conscious experience.²⁴ Hume seems to describe something like a physiology of affect when he writes that "the blood flows with a new tide; the heart is elevated," and the whole organism acquires a "new vigor" in the presence of a "rational and thinking being like ourselves."²⁵ It is as if sympathy is constituted out of bodily response, and the corresponding judgment that I am with a "rational and thinking being like myself" is either a precipitate of these physical effects or a redundant discursive formulation of their significance. Such moments in sentimentalist writing have tempted both literary critics and philosophers to claim strong correspondences between modern scientific investigations of affect, empathy, and "mind reading," on the one hand, and eighteenth-century hypotheses of sympathy, on the other. Surprisingly, within literary studies such interpretations have come to coexist with poststructuralist and historicist accounts of sentimental rhetoric that adhere to a strictly constructionist account

of the emotions and therefore tend to emphasize the factitiousness of sympathy in the period: its specularity, its theatricality, its manneristic deployment of tears, blushes, sighs, palpitations.²⁶ Even though the attention to affect as a corporeal process involving bodily reaction and unconscious neural functions relies on scientific hypotheses of “basic emotions” that are historically and culturally constant (universal and innate mechanisms), this perspective has generally been taken to supplement rather than controvert analysis of emotion as the social, constructed, cultural determination, or “capture” of affect.²⁷ Both approaches belong to a wider poststructuralist (or sometimes posthumanist) decentering or displacement of “consciousness” and “mind” as loci of intention and agency, and in both cases, theoretical presuppositions shape, a priori, the object of study. If we already understand affect as a neurobiological function, and if we already understand emotion as a historically determined and culturally relative mode of subject formation, then sympathy will only ever be a particular articulation of these predetermined categories. Methodologically, however rich and rigorous a particular reading might be, the text in question inevitably offers an exemplification that affirms (or occasionally subverts) a conceptualization of emotion that is extrinsic to the formal and aesthetic specificity of the work at hand.²⁸ Textual interpretation can work toward an exposure of sympathy as a specific instantiation of “affect” or “emotion” but will leave those larger categories unmodified by its exegetical labors.

Eighteenth-century representations of sympathy might or might not be seen to correspond with, or anticipate, or be usefully illuminated by current research on “mirror neurons” (echoing Hume’s proposal that the “minds of men are mirrors to one another”), but interdisciplinary efforts to align cultural studies with empirical findings tend to neglect the humanistic genealogy of contemporary scientific paradigms. There is instead a tendency to construe current scientific research on empathy in particular as “confirmations” of eighteenth-century theories that are also the cultural sources for the frameworks of inquiry that have played a significant part in these developments in evolutionary biology and cognitive psychology. Thus, for a philosopher like Jesse Prinz, committed to “us[ing] empirical findings to help adjudicate otherwise interminable philosophical debate,” the preponderance of research indicating that “emotions are necessary for moral judgment” licenses an argument that “sentimentalism [as theorized by Hume] is true” while Kantian-inspired “normative ethical theories,” if not altogether false, are “inaccurate” descriptions of ethical experience.²⁹ Simi-

larly, Stephen Darwall (a less ardent empiricist than Prinz) argues that “Hume and Adam Smith correctly believed” sympathy “to be central to human thought and practice” because their “theoretical speculations” have been vindicated by “experimental psychology.”³⁰ Darwall’s defense of the primacy of sympathetic concern against a “metaphysical” commitment to “rational egoism” draws on experimental research on facial recognition, motor mimicry, and emotional simulation in support of eighteenth-century sentimental psychology.³¹

Recent work in so-called cognitive literary studies extends this reliance on the explanatory force of empirical findings and scientific experiment into rhetorical analysis and narrative theory. Thus, Blakey Vermeule concludes her recent study of emotional engagement with fictional characters by hailing the “growing movement towards understanding literary experience . . . as a human phenomenon that can be tested, measured, and defined in ever more precise terms.”³² Applying “theory of mind” (ToM) findings about the cognitive mechanisms involved in perceiving and interpreting the thoughts and feelings of other persons, Lisa Zunshine hypothesizes that “the novel, in particular, is implicated with our mind-reading ability to such a degree that . . . in its currently familiar shape it exists because we are creatures with ToM.”³³ Alan Richardson is perhaps more circumspect in his engagement with contemporary work in the brain sciences—conceding that these fields are “not intrinsically superior to or more authoritative than the humanities”—but he also openly admits “hold[ing] a scientific world view as part of my basic intellectual equipment” and thus “accept[ing] unhesitatingly that ‘the mind is what the brain does.’”³⁴ Ultimately, Richardson is clearly drawn to scientific “resolutions” to questions that, as Prinz puts it, have generated “interminable philosophical debate” as well as richly varied aesthetic treatment. “The traditional philosophical problem of other minds really isn’t a problem,” Richardson observes, because “according to ToM theory . . . human beings are adaptively designed . . . to search for and identify signs of intentionality, emotions and belief states in others.”³⁵ From this perspective, the representations of “mind reading” and its failures in Jane Austen’s narratives correspond with the (scientific) resolution to the “philosophical problem of other minds” rather than offer a complex aesthetic engagement with that very problem. The “intersubjective dramas” of Austen’s fiction provide (and in some sense are reduced to) illustrative corroboration of current empirical findings about social cognition, so, although “the flexible medium of fictional representation and technique” allows for a “more holistic account” than the “necessarily limiting means of the

controlled experiment,” the aesthetic and the scientific are implicitly coextensive with one another—more or less precise or accurate studies of human behavior.³⁶ Concomitant with this attenuated regard for aesthetics as a distinct mode of cognition is a diminished account of the formal techniques and rhetorical elaboration specific to literary works. Thus, Paul Hernandi maintains that “there is no clear division between literary and non-literary signification,” a contention Zunshine identifies as “an important tenet of [the] cognitive approach.”³⁷

My aim here is not so much to call this interdisciplinary effort into question but rather to more clearly delineate what I take to be at stake in eschewing the attention to brains and bodies so prevalent in recent work on affect and empathy that, like this book, is concerned with the forms and possibilities of relational experience. It does not suffice to note, though it is perhaps worth recalling, that the creeping reliance on scientific evidence in humanistic and cultural studies runs counter to the romantic era’s own insistent articulations of the distinctive domain of literary and aesthetic attention. Wordsworth imagines the poet “at [the] side” of the scientist, making his discoveries “proper objects of the Poet’s art” only *if* and *when* those discoveries “be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings.”³⁸ Until that time, scientific knowledge “cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence” unlike poetic knowledge, “slow to come to us,” which “by no habitual and direct sympathy connect[s] us with our fellow-beings” (881). What Wordsworth might mean in suggesting that the sympathy shaped in poetry is nonhabitual and indirect matters in this study precisely because it at once incorporates and seems to rebuke the presumption of reliable, immediate sympathetic connection to others, which, in its own way, was the core hypothesis of sentimentalism as the psychological science of its time. The “other” knowledge of poetry, unlike the inescapable “unalienable” truths of science, may or may not become a “personal and individual acquisition,” in which case we are free to forgo it, to leave our habits undisturbed. I take it that not acquiring the knowledge of poetry as Wordsworth conceives it here means forfeiting the indirect sympathy that connects us with our fellow beings. How audacious is this claim? Are we unconnected by “habitual and direct sympathy,” or is it rather that the knowledge of connection with others that is not given but acquired, or attained, might itself be constitutive of new, strange, and arduous forms of connection? Wordsworth’s claim hovers over the terms “sympathy,” “connection,” and “fellow-beings,” at once assuming and obscuring their relationship to one another and their collective relation to a way of knowing that

is neither necessary in itself nor necessarily shared (“a personal and individual acquisition”). To take heed of such confusion is, perhaps, not to be arrested in one’s thought but to be slowed down in thought, given over to what might “come to us” by way of rhetorical intimation rather than conceptual cogency.

Insofar as theorists of affect, on the one hand, and enthusiasts for contemporary theories of mind reading, on the other, are alike liable to seek out instantiation of explanatory models in their objects of study, they will not have much patience for Wordsworth’s ensnaring of the term “sympathy” with insistent yet obscure claims that poetry is a mode of knowledge that arrives (if it does) not immediately and habitually but slowly and indirectly, nor will they have much patience for my tendency to belabor and pursue the suggestive implications of Wordsworth’s claims rather than to assimilate them to a clarifying theoretical or scientific framework.³⁹ As I noted earlier, this study does not aim to provide a historical account of variations in sentimental and romantic renderings of relational experience, but I do recognize and often rely on such accounts and can readily imagine amplifications and revisions of the readings offered here along historical lines. My insistence on the specificities and irresolutions involved in the effort to define and represent possibilities of intimacy between persons is, however, driven by something like an anxiety about missing the implications of the period’s compulsive intellectual and aesthetic engagement with those possibilities, and thereby failing to make out the terms of readerly engagement elicited by the texts themselves. I attend, therefore, to the evocative rhetorical, figural, and conceptual discriminations that make “sympathy” (for example) so unstable and liable to subtle but consequential reinterpretation virtually *every* time it appears. This is not simply to say that Shaftesbury’s use of sympathy differs from Hume’s or Rousseau’s (though that is certainly the case) but also that its appearance in a particular text (Hume’s *Enquiry*, as distinct from his *Treatise*, for example; Wordsworth’s “Old Cumberland Beggar,” as distinct from *The Prelude* and the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*) always compels a renewed effort to account for the otherwise undetermined responsiveness it names.

ROMANTIC INTIMACY

The emotions that recurrently arise in *Romantic Intimacy*—especially disappointment, respect, gratitude, appreciation, frustration, embarrassment—are ones that I am reluctant to label as either cognitive or precognitive precisely because the way these feelings or moods implicate or correlate with self-knowledge

and knowledge of others is almost always at issue in their textual elaborations. These emotions are perhaps para-cognitive, shaping and being shaped by prior assumptions and reasoned expectations in a dynamic interplay that alternately defines and dissolves the conceptual boundaries between feeling and knowing.

Kant's account of "respect" is especially pertinent here. Insofar as it involves projections and intimations of one's own identity (as a rational being), respect might be imagined as the necessary precondition for recognition of others as ends in themselves, an implication Kant dreaded enough to repeatedly refute. "It could be objected that I only seek refuge, behind the word *respect*, in an obscure feeling [*dunkelen Gefühle*]," he writes in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, "but though respect is a feeling . . . it is . . . a feeling *self-wrought* by means of a rational concept [*einen Vernunftbegriff selbstgewirktes Gefühl*]" and therefore distinct from all other feelings "which can be reduced to inclination or fear" (*GM*, 56; all emphases in the original unless otherwise noted). In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant explains that "sensible feeling [*sinnliche Gefühl*] . . . is indeed the condition of that feeling we call respect, but the cause determining it lies in pure practical reason" (*CPR*, 201). At stake in the struggle to distinguish respect from other feelings is an effort to displace the immediacy of affective response (so important to the sentimentalists) with an alternative temporality of judgment that grants reason the determining, urgent role.⁴⁰ Thus, there is a concession to feeling in general as the condition for the possibility of respect but an insistence that the particular feeling of respect arises only with the cognition or consciousness of the moral law that commands respect. Respect is thus "the *effect* of the law on the subject, and not the *cause* of the law" (*GM*, 56); it is "produced solely by reason" and "seems to be solely at the disposal of reason" (*CPR*, 201–202); the affective form is wrought by rational content.

The wresting of respect from its underlying condition in feeling seems inextricably bound up with Kant's effort to subordinate respect for persons to respect for the law governing their relations. The transpersonal recognition of oneself and therefore others as ends in themselves is consistently invoked only to be insistently sublated. "*Respect* is directed only to persons, never to things" (*CPR*, 202) Kant specifies, but "any respect for a person is properly only respect for the law" (*GM*, 56). Nevertheless, insofar as the law we respect concerns the "idea of the *dignity* [*Würde*] of a rational being"—which necessarily entails a vision of "the relation of rational beings to one another" (*GM*, 84) and of all persons as equal to one another—it is clear that an identificatory recognition of

others as essentially like oneself is embedded within, and perhaps even constitutive of, the concept of the moral law itself. In this sense, Kant's metaphysics of morals shares more with the ethics of alterity advanced by Emmanuel Levinas than might appear at first glance, and their points of convergence attest to the persistence, within modernity, of philosophical aspirations arising in the late Enlightenment. Like Kant's notion of the other as an end-in-herself, Levinas's principal figuration of the Other as the face is insistently nonphenomenal and immaterial. (Consider, as an instructive contrast, Wittgenstein's famous remark that "the human body is the best picture of the human soul" [178], an aphoristic distillation of the habitual responsiveness to others evinced by the myriad concrete instances compiled in the *Philosophical Investigations*.) In Levinas the encounter with the Other, which evokes the "epiphany" of my absolute responsibility, involves an obligation analogous to the self-imposed constraint of the moral law in Kant—as the later philosopher himself acknowledges. What "we catch sight of [in the face] seems suggested by the practical philosophy of Kant, to which we feel particularly close": this conceptual affinity certainly underlies the notion that "universality reigns as the presence of humanity in the eyes that look at me."⁴¹ Levinasian "otherness" is, in a sense, shared. Bearing in mind that the eyes looking at me, like the face, are figures for irreducible alterity *and* universality at once, it is possible to see the immediacy of ethical revelation in Levinas as commensurate with the imperative force of respect in Kant.

The "look" of the other "appeals to my responsibility and consecrates my freedom as responsibility," writes Levinas; so too, for Kant, does recognition of the other's dignity. The Levinasian face may be taken as a proleptic reminder that the moral law in Kant cannot be fully abstracted from recognition (of the likeness and equality of rational beings); it inevitably bears some trace of persons. I do not mean to discount the clarity or efficacy of distinctions that Kant carefully draws but rather to emphasize the complex interdependence of terms within the exposition that aims to separate them. Even if respect involves a "rational determination," it cannot be wholly distilled from the capacity for emotion (what Kant elsewhere terms the "subjective conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty" [*MM*, 528]) that is the necessary ground for its possibility. Even if "law" is understood as the proper object of respect, the formal abstraction cannot wholly elide the recognitions, projections, and identifications entailed in *seeing* others as ends in themselves, for these are necessarily antecedent to and implicit in respect for a law that enjoins us to treat others as ends in themselves.