Introduction: Reading Sympathy

1. Victorian Sympathy

This book examines the relationship between sympathy and subjectivity in the mid-nineteenth-century novel of marriage. Specifically, it is concerned with the implications of the common Victorian claim that novel reading constitutes a way to achieve the psychic, ethical, and affective benefits also commonly associated with sympathy in married life: like a good wife in relation to her husband, novelists and critics claimed, novels could "influence" readers and so help them resist the depraved values of the marketplace. The Marriage of Minds thus has several goals. It begins to fill a long-standing gap between eighteenth-century philosophical notions of sympathy as a structure through which subjects define themselves in relation to others, and twentieth-century psychoanalytic concepts of identification as the means by which, as Mikkel Borch-Jacobson puts it, "the other . . . gives me my identity." It examines the wide variety of ways in which novels were understood to "interpellate" readers in the mid-nineteenth century. And it demonstrates how both the form of the Victorian novel and the experience supposed to result from that form, were implicated in ongoing debates about the nature, purpose, and law of marriage.

This project departs from many recent accounts of Victorian sympathy, which identify sympathy with pity or compassion. So, for example, Thomas Laqueur has described how a wide range of Victorian texts seek to create "'sympathetic passions'" and so encourage ameliorative intervention on behalf of the poor or the suffering.² Along similar lines, Janice Carlisle has claimed that Victorian novelists regarded reading as "a process in which the subject is invited to identify through sympathy

with the object of his perception" and so develop her or his morally significant "imaginative capacities." And Martha Nussbaum has asserted the political importance of the Victorian novel on the grounds that such texts can train us to "identify sympathetically with individual members of marginalized or oppressed groups within our own society" and so encourage us to act for their benefit. This book, by contrast, focuses less on sympathy as pity, than on sympathy as a psychic structure through which the subject is produced, consolidated, or redefined. It is less interested in sympathy as a feeling, in other words, than in sympathy as a mode of relating to others and of defining a self.

As scholars of the eighteenth century have long recognized, these two aspects of sympathy—as pity or compassion, and as a source of identity-are closely related. Shaftesbury, Hume, Smith, and the other eighteenth-century moral philosophers who first asserted sympathy's importance, sought to replace Hobbes's vision of society as a way to limit otherwise-violent competitions between rapacious individuals with a notion of the social order as the inevitable product of our inherently social sentiments.5 For them, the common experience of "entering into" another's feelings creates a bond between the subject and object able to counter selfishness and so consolidate communities. Sympathy was thus simultaneously imagined as an important source of civic stability and as an important source of individuals' sense of self. In David Hume's account, for example, it is precisely because of "that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments" that we both feel like members of larger social grounds and are able to maintain a recognizable self.6 Even though Hume criticizes plagiarists for engaging in "a kind of castle-building, where the imagination amuses itself with its own fictions and strives to render them firm and stable by a sympathy with the sentiments of others,"7 as Adela Pinch points out, "Hume's plagiarist in fact seems to resemble all Humean persons, consolidating the imaginative fiction of personal identity not only through objects which the laws of association allow them to call their own but also through perversely wandering feelings that originate in other people."8 Thus, even though he claims that communities arise because of sympathetic connections between implicitly preexisting individuals, those individuals ultimately also come to seem like the products of the communities from which they acquire feelings. Adam Smith offers an analogous account of sympathy, insisting on the naturalness, productivity, and pos-

sible priority of our sympathetic attachments to others. "How selfish soever man may be supposed," he writes, "there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it." In making this claim, Smith is insisting on the naturalness and inevitability of sympathy, and hence on its ability to serve as a feasible basis of society. Yet at the same time, he also claims that our desire for others' sympathy is so strong that we often make decisions on the basis of whether "when we place ourselves in the situation of another man, and view [our actions], as it were, with his eyes and from his station, we . . . can or cannot entirely enter into and sympathize with the sentiments and motives which influenced [them]." The most fully virtuous man, Smith concludes, is defined almost entirely through his sympathy with and his desire for sympathy from other members of his community.

Despite the popularity of such notions of sympathy in the mid-eighteenth century,11 most scholars agree that by the end of the eighteenth century, tensions inherent to those notions, the violence of the French Revolution, and the utilitarian critique of feeling's failure to regulate behavior, had undermined any exclusive faith in the power of sympathy to redress social ills.12 This is not to say that scholars have claimed that sympathy disappeared from discussions of the public sphere: most have agreed with Stefan Collini that even though "nineteenth-century political thought . . . was distinguished above all by its emphasis upon the egoism and rationality of individual agents, . . . the texture of moral response among the most prominent Victorian intellectuals was marked at least as much by an obsession with the role of altruism and a concern for the cultivation of the feelings."13 Nevertheless, historians have shown that, particularly in the context of the nineteenth-century turn to institutional solutions to social problems, sympathy was increasingly identified with the private sphere.14 Even as sympathy's significance as a way to consolidate communities diminished, its function as a structure through which the subject is constituted in relation to others did not.15 On the contrary, as this book seeks to demonstrate, its significance may have actually increased as it came to serve as a way to differentiate between public and private spheres, to define gender difference, and to defend the legal status quo regarding marriage.16 Specifically, sympathy was increasingly identified as a way to preserve married men's best selves from corruption by the marketplace—as a

way to foster the sensitivity, generosity, and compassion increasingly regarded as incompatible with the rational self-interest required in their professional lives.¹⁷ Hence, as the "self-made" man of the nineteenth century18 came to replace the "man of feeling" of the eighteenth, marriage in general and marital sympathy in particular came to play a greater role as a way for the married man to "faithfully pursue the necessary avocations of the day, and keep as it were a separate soul for his family, his social duty, and his God."19 Even though, as Sarah Stickney Ellis claimed, men's striving for worldly aggrandizement "is constantly misleading their steps, closing their ears against the voice of conscience, and beguiling them with the promise of peace, where peace was never found," domestic ideologists consistently claimed that with his wife's help, he might be able to preserve his best, least selfish, most spiritual self.20 Naturally more virtuous, and sequestered from the public sphere, the wife's principal role came to be defined in terms of her ability to redeem her husband. And the home over which she presided came to be regarded as, ideally, "the nursery of all virtue, the fountain-head of all true affection, and the main source of the strength of the nation."21 Marital sympathy thus came to function both as a pleasure characteristic of the domestic sphere—a reward for the man's hard labor in the marketplace—and as what enables him to persist in those labors without being entirely corrupted.

2. Sympathy and the Novel

The close relation between the novel and the domestic sphere was clearly recognized in the nineteenth century.²² Critics consistently called attention to the home as the principal site of the novel's consumption and as the most common focus of its plots.²³ Additionally—and for my purposes, most importantly—they also frequently identified the domestic novel, in particular, with the reproduction of values associated with the home, and hence as a way to supplement the wife's efforts in countering the effects of the marketplace. Other literary forms were thought to serve similar functions. However, unlike sermons, history, or poetry—all of which were assumed to require some degree of intellectual labor—novels were thought to constitute the "resource of the young and the idle, or of the wise too in their moments of weariness and aimless relaxation."²⁴ And as a result, the novelist was often regarded as "reach[ing] ears which will hear no others," and so able to

"convey a lesson to them which the preacher would enforce in vain." Hence, many agreed with James Moncrieff that "No kind of writing has more influence over the daily and domestic thoughts of a people," for "The indolent read nothing else, and even the intellectual do not despise their relaxation." ²⁶

The exact means by which novels were thought to instruct or influence readers varied widely. But the novel's ability to encourage sympathy was consistently identified as central to its effectiveness.²⁷ For some commentators that sympathy involved encouraging compassion for and generosity toward the poor. But for others it took forms much more closely resembling the sympathetic influence of the wife: it did not just educate readers in the experiences of their fellows, in other words; it effectively retrained their ways of seeing, understanding, and feeling. According to the anonymous author of "The Progress of Fiction as an Art" (1853), for example, novels' value derives from their ability to "beguile men into entertaining holier and juster thoughts than had ever before been theirs, and whilst apparently only ministering to the amusement of an idle hour, preach a sermon that may send his readers to their various walks of life with improved views and nobler aspirations."28 Nearly all of the terms in this passage resonate with contemporary paeans to domesticity and female influence: its ability to make its audience "holier" and "juster"; its power to amuse the reader and yet also improve him; and its effectiveness in making his aspirations "nobler" than they were before. In an 1868 essay on "Miss Braddon," the reviewer for the Eclectic Review goes still further, describing the novel not just as having effects analogous to the wife's, but as being in some sense interchangeable with her:

the novel is hailed with delight, and welcomed and cherished as a most pleasant companion, [an] inexhaustible and ever-varying source of amusement and delight; the administrator of hope and friendly counsel, and, it may be, the fountain of blessed consolation to myriads of human souls. It is invaluable as a means of relaxation and amusement for wearied mental and bodily faculties, and as an additional enjoyment for the fireside and family circles; the human interests which lie embedded in its pages secure for it the sympathies of both young and old.²⁹

Here, not only is the novel form identified with an implicitly feminized set of responsibilities—for delight, companionship, amusement, hope, and so forth—by characterizing the novel as "a most pleasant companion," the "administrator of hope and friendly counsel," the provider of

"relaxation and amusement for wearied mental and bodily faculties," and an object of the sympathies of "young and old alike," the anonymous critic comes very close to identifying it as a kind of person, able to function in lieu of the wife.³⁰

Still other commentators cast the novel less as a supplement to or a substitute for the effects of the wife, than as a way to achieve important psychic and ethical effects no real woman ever could. And at these moments, an implicit claim emerges regarding the superiority of readerly to marital sympathy. In his "Essay on Literature" (1836), for example, John Ruskin praises the novel form for the fact that, unlike people who are notoriously difficult to understand and so to sympathize with, in relation to characters, we know everything there is to know. As he explains, in reading novels,

We hold intercourse with an infinite variety of characters, and that under peculiarly favourable circumstances, for their thoughts and the motives of their actions are laid open to us by the author; we perceive where they mistake and where they do wrong, we behold the workings of their feelings and the operation of their reason, and we see that according to the justice and wisdom of the means pursued is the success obtained.³¹

Because we can see "into" characters and so understand their "thoughts" and "motives" with an accuracy unavailable to us in real life, we can understand them to an extent that is impossible with real people. Such a power is obviously useful for teaching us about other people: as James Fitzjames Stephen points out, one of our principal reasons for reading fiction is that "[men] often do act like characters represented in novels." Yet, for Ruskin, whatever knowledge or understanding novels might yield is less important than the experience of unselfconsciousness they encourage. "[W]e are not speaking of the acquisition of worldly wisdom," he insists, but instead of how reading novels leads to "the improvement of the mind": 33

no one ever envies the hero of a romance; selfishness is put entirely out of the question; we feel as if we were the air, or the wind, or the light, or the heaven, or some omnipresent, invisible thing that had no interests of its own. We become, for the time, spirits altogether benevolent, altogether just, hating vice, loving virtue, weeping over the crime, exulting in the just conduct, lamenting the misfortune, rejoicing in the welfare of others. Is this no advance in morality? Have we not for the time overcome, or, rather, driven away our great enemy, Self? Have we not become more like the angels? Are not our emotions sweeter, our hopes purer, our tears holier, when they are felt for others, nourished for others, wept for others? Every one must ac-

knowledge that a continuance of such utterly unselfish feelings of love and universal benevolence must be beneficial, must be humanizing to the mind by which they are experienced.³⁴

The experience of forgetting ourselves and so having "no interests of [our] own" is valuable in and of itself, for it means that at least for a brief time, we have become "more like the angels." It will also produce effects that linger after the novel is completed—effects that will make us better, more spiritual, and less selfish than we were before. Like a good wife, then, the novel helps us maintain and cultivate our best selves. But the novel has additional resources and strategies no woman could ever possess.

3. Defining Sympathy

Ruskin's description of the unselfconscious absorption he experiences while reading might seem like a far cry from the ways in which we usually think about sympathy. Yet, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, in the nineteenth century the term "sympathy" was used to describe a large range of psychic phenomena.35 The first definition alone begins to suggest some of the ambiguities inherent to notions of sympathy: "1a.) A (real or supposed) affinity between certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence one another (esp. in some occult way), or attract or tend towards each other." This definition leaves open the question of whether the affinity between the two things is real or supposed; whether they are similarly affected by the same external influence, or instead affect one another; and the nature of their attraction to one another. Subsequent definitions only generate additional questions. Definition (2), for example, describes sympathy as meaning "Agreement, accord, harmony, consonance, concord; agreement in qualities, likeness, conformity, correspondence"—raising questions about whether "consonance" or "concord" necessarily brings the sympathizing entities closer together. In the context of scarce resources, for example, consonant desires might instead lead to competition.36 Not until definitions (3b) and (3c) do we arrive at something that looks like more recent understandings of sympathy:

3b.) The quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling.

Also, a feeling or frame of mind evoked by and responsive to some external influence. 3c.) The quality or state of being thus affected by the suffering or sorrow of another; a feeling of compassion or commiseration.

Even these definitions are offered as derivatives of (3a), however, which makes sympathy look more like a shared feeling than "compassion or commiseration": "Conformity of feelings, inclinations, or temperament, which makes persons agreeable to each other; community of feeling; harmony of disposition." As we will see, in the context of particular novels, "conformity of feelings" can result in "community of feeling," or it can lead to something like self-annihilation.

In this book I define sympathy as broadly possible, as the experience of entering imaginatively into another's thoughts or feelings. I am thus interested less in the term "sympathy" than in the wide variety of ways in which the encounter between minds-whether of husband and wife, or of reader and text—was imagined in the nineteenth century. And as the foregoing accounts should make clear, domestic ideologists, literary critics, and novelists were all centrally concerned with the consequences of such encounters: with their potential for altering how we think, feel, or perceive. They were thus concerned with something very closely akin to what we now usually call "interpellation," or the way "all ideology hails or recognizes concrete individuals as concrete subjects."37 Part of the project of this book is to determine precisely how Victorian writers and readers understood the means by which we become subjects through our encounters with others. Such a project seeks to intervene in a relatively recent tendency to treat the interpellative effects of the Victorian novel as a kind of scandal. In his highly influential The Novel and the Police (1988), for example, D. A. Miller argues that, although the novel seems to offer its reader a space of psychic freedom, that freedom is no more than an illusion that obscures the way the novel continually disciplines us through its implicit and explicit modes of address. In the context of nineteenth-century critics' and novelists' concern with how novels can most efficiently influence or improve readers, Miller's claim that the novel form sought to "confirm the novel-reader in his identity as 'liberal subject'" seems indisputable.38 But by claiming the novel "dissembl[es]" its effects, he ignores the extent to which Victorian critics explicitly addressed the political, ethical, and psychic effects of the experience of novel read-

At the same time, however, I do not pretend to make any claims

about how readers actually experienced novels. Nor am I convinced that it is necessarily possible to make such claims. ⁴⁰ Jonathan Rose has recently argued that "the history of the common reader, at least after 1800, is recoverable." ⁴¹ Yet even Rose is forced to speculate about readers' experiences: however much journals, letters, and essays may tell us about how a few (especially self-conscious) readers described their experiences of reading, they can tell us little about how either they or other readers actually read. ⁴² Rather than seeking to recover how readers experienced novels, therefore, my goal is simply to try to reconstruct some small portion of the "horizon of expectations" within which the writers I examine were writing. ⁴³

My skepticism regarding attempts like Rose's does not signal any rejection of the importance of history. On the contrary, one of the goals of this book is to demonstrate how literary, social, and political history can make available new readings of canonical texts. I thus maintain a similar skepticism toward Garrett Stewart's claim in *Dear Reader*:

As a symptom but, more important, as a tool of cultural construction, fictional reading is inductive. . . . The result is that criticism gets closest to its object when retracing just this inductive route. And such a procedure lays fewer traps for the critic than is often thought. No ideology of the literary need be subscribed to—even though its temptations must no doubt be felt—in order to reread the conscriptive strategies of Victorian fiction as a highly specialized set of ideological inculcations. 44

In this passage, Stewart suggests that the strategies by which the novel seeks to "lead you on" are transparently available to late twentieth-and twenty-first-century readers. In this book, by contrast, I argue that only a close study of nineteenth-century novels, literary criticism, and the discourses and debates with which they intersected can reveal to us how Victorians thought about writing and reading novels. Through such readings, then, I seek to suggest what is to be gained from attending to the *differences* between nineteenth-century assumptions about novel reading and our own: and hence too to the points at which we might *not* be able to be led on by the strategies of the novel.⁴⁵

4. Sympathy, Marriage, and the Law

As a way to suggest some of the differences that history makes to how we think about reading, this book focuses, in particular, on the debates that arose around marriage law reform. The central issue in many of the discussions of marriage law—whether the specific issue

involved child custody, divorce, or married women's property—was coverture, a legal doctrine consistently discussed in relation to questions about the conditions, nature, consequences, and limitations of sympathy. As William Blackstone describes the doctrine in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1756):

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and <code>cover</code>, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-french a <code>feme-covert . . .</code> and her condition during her marriage is called her <code>coverture</code>. Upon this principle, of an union of person in husband and wife, depend almost all the legal rights, duties, and disabilities, that either of them acquire by the marriage. . . . For this reason, a man cannot grant any thing to his wife, or enter into covenant with her: for the grant would be to suppose her separate existence; and to covenant with her, would be only to covenant with himself.⁴⁷

Under coverture, the wife's legal identity was effectively absorbed into her husband's. All her "personal" property was transferred to her husband at the time of the marriage. All land, or "real" property, reverted to her in the case of her husband's death, but he controlled any income it generated during his lifetime. In addition, anything the wife earned or inherited during the marriage legally belonged to the husband. She could not make contracts or incur debts without his approval. Nor could she sue or be sued in a court of law. Only the extremely wealthy were routinely exempted from these laws: under the rules of equity, a portion of a married woman's property could be set aside in the form of a trust for her use or the use of her children. However, the legal costs involved in establishing trusts made them unavailable to the vast majority of the population. For most married couples, therefore, husband and wife were legally "one person," and, as one popular saying put it, "that one [was] the husband."

The legal doctrine of coverture was only ever a "legal fiction" used to identify the household rather than the individual as the basic social unit.⁵⁰ Yet in the debates that led up to the passage of the Custody of Infants Bill (1839), the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), and the Married Women's Property Act (1870), coverture was often conflated or confused with several other popular notions of what it means for two people to come together: the Christian notion of husband and wife constituting "one flesh"; the Platonic notion of soul-mates as two halves of a single being; and domestic ideologists' claims re-

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garding husbands' and wives' sympathetic bond. According to James Grantham Turner, the notion that the husband and wife comprise a single being dates back to late Renaissance fusions of biblical notions of married love with Aristophanes' description in the Symposium of the first humans as "Janus-headed and double-bodied androgynes... who were sliced in two as a punishment for their hubristic attempt to storm Olympus, and condemned to perpetual erotic yearning for their severed halves."51 In Genesis, by contrast, Adam offers the fact that Eve was formed from his rib as a way to account for the closeness of their union. Upon being introduced to Eve, Adam proclaims: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (2:23). The passage continues: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (2:24). According to Turner, at least until the middle of the sixteenth century, exegetes tended to focus on the biblical passage's implications for the role of sexual relations in marriage: for them, the meaning of "one flesh" depended on whether they believed sexual relations between husband and wife to be "'carnal knowledge' . . . virtually equated with the fall itself," or as a sign of the "'perpetual fountain' of God's continued favour."52 By the nineteenth century, by contrast, the notion of "one flesh" had been almost entirely secularized and desexualized—as well as combined with notions of coverture and marital sympathy or female influence. As a result, there is a consistent slippage between discussions of marriage as making husband and wife one person legally (under coverture), practically (as in a household with a division of labor), romantically (as in desexualized versions of the Symposium), or psychically (as in an extreme form of sympathy).53

Different accounts of the notions of coverture, "one flesh," and marital sympathy were mobilized to very different political ends. Such accounts do not line up with absolute consistency with particular political positions. Nevertheless, those who sought to achieve property rights and legal recognizability for married women usually assumed that sympathy requires a degree of similarity and understanding that can only arise in a context of relative equality. So for example, according to John Stuart Mill, coverture should be abolished, for "Even with true affection, authority on the one side and subordination on the other prevent perfect confidence." Only so long as there is no fear on the one side or coercive power on the other, he insisted, can true sympathy

be achieved. Meanwhile, other progressives mocked the notion that sympathy arises from the absorption of the wife's legal identity into the husband's. As Cornelia Frances Cornwallis argued in 1856, for example, "the provisions of our common law, so far from being founded on the refined idea of an affection so strong that two existences might by its influence merge into one—as some sentimental chapters in modern law treatises assume,—are precisely those which belong to the relation of master and bondswoman." In an 1868 essay, "Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors," Frances Power Cobbe puts this claim even more powerfully, arguing that English marriage is modeled on the relations of the "Tarantula Spider":

As most persons are aware, when one of these delightful creatures is placed under a glass with a companion of his own species a little smaller than himself, he forthwith gobbles him up; making him thus, in a very literal manner, "bone of his bone" (supposing tarantulas to have any bones) "and flesh of his flesh." The operation being completed, the victorious spider visibly acquires double bulk, and thenceforth may be understood to "represent the family" in the most perfect manner conceivable. ⁵⁶

Coverture, Cornwallis and Cobbe insist, simply erases the legal identity of one of the parties; it does not generate anything like the psychic and affective harmony of sympathy.

Conservatives, by contrast, tended to insist that sympathy arises from the identity of interests and absence of competition that result from coverture. Hence, contrary to Lawrence Stone's influential claim that "companionate marriage demanded a reassessment of power relations between the sexes since it depended on a greater sense of equality and sharing," the most obviously romantic notions of married love were very often invoked for the most conservative ends.⁵⁷ In her review of Mill's *Subjection*, for example, Margaret Oliphant argues that

this faulty law [i.e., the law of coverture] has yet amid all its offensive and tyrannical enactments caught sight of the principle in which lies all the difficulties of the question, and which Mr. Mill ignores. It is, that the man and the woman united in the first of all primitive bonds, the union upon which the world and the race depend, *are* one person. We say it not sentimentally or poetically, but with the profoundest sense of reality and seriousness. ⁵⁸

Specifically because the "offices they hold in the world are essentially different," she continues, husband and wife "are two halves of a complete being": "The two are not rivals, they are not alike. They are different creatures. They are one." Here and elsewhere, Oliphant is careful

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to insist that she is not romanticizing this unity. As she writes in her 1856 essay, "The Laws Concerning Women": "The 'marriage of true minds' may be as rare as it is lofty and fortunate. The marriage of interests, hopes, and purposes is universal." (60) Yet, despite this disclaimer, Oliphant often makes it seem as if it is precisely the "union of souls and sympathies of which lovers dream" that would be endangered by the abolition of coverture: (61)

it is a mere trick of words to say that the woman loses her existence, and is absorbed in her husband. Were it so in reality—and were it indeed true, "that the poor rivulet loseth her name, is carried and recarried with her new associate, beareth no sway, possesseth nothing"[62]—then would the question of female inferiority be fairly proved and settled once for all. Mighty indeed must be the Titanic current of that soul which could receive one whole human being, full of thoughts, affections, and emotions, into its tide, and yet remain uncoloured and unchanged. There is not such monster of a man, and no such nonentity of a woman, in ordinary life. Which of us does not carry our wife's thoughts in our brain, and our wife's likings in our heart, with the most innocent unconsciousness that they are not our own original property?⁶³

In this notion of carrying "our wife's thoughts in our brain, and our wife's likings in our heart," Oliphant comes very close to reproducing precisely the "romancing" she claims so vehemently to reject.

Such "romancing" could take many different forms. Moderate conservative Sarah Stickney Ellis, for example, imagines an almost Smithian dynamic between husband and wife, describing how often

when the snares of the world were around him, and temptations from within and without have bribed over the witness in his own bosom, [the husband] has thought of the humble monitress who sat alone, guarding the fireside comforts of his distant home; and the remembrance of her character, clothed in moral beauty, has scattered the clouds before his mental vision, and sent him back to that beloved home, a wiser and a better man.⁶⁴

Ellis here casts the wife as an embodiment of Smith's "impartial spectator," the thought of whose judgment "often make[s] us blush inwardly, both for our folly and inattention to our own happiness, and for our still greater indifference and inattention, perhaps, to that of other people." In Woman's Mission (1839), by contrast, Sarah Lewis describes a form of female influence that is much closer to Hume's conception of sympathy in her claim that influences "act by a sort of moral contagion, and are imbibed by the receiver as they flow from their source, without consciousness on either side." As proof of this assertion she

cites "family likeness; whereby persons of different features, complexions, and statures resemble each other, and also one common model, in a manner totally incomprehensible." This account almost explicitly echoes Hume's claim that "To this principle [of sympathy] we ought to ascribe the great uniformity we may observe in the humours and turn of thinking of those of the same nation." And finally, the anonymous author of Why Women Cannot Be Turned Into Men (1872) attributes "female influence" to woman's "habit of absorbing herself in the man, losing her identity in him, and living a kind of reflected life." In this account, "female influence" comes very close to a form of female erasure, and sympathy comes to seem like a kind of self-loss."

All the novels that I examine in this book are interested in the relation between these gendered and politicized notions of sympathy and the forms of sympathy available in relation to the novel. They are thus all committed to exploring—and most of them to capitalizing on—the homologies between marital and readerly sympathy in order to intervene in the political, social, and literary field. The nature of these attempts often relates to their authors' genders, though not always in the ways one might expect. While it is certainly true that some female novelists capitalized on the identification of the novel with female influence, some male novelists did as well. And while some critics agreed with G. H. Lewes's claim that "Woman, by her greater affectionateness, her greater range and depth of emotional experience, is well fitted to give expression to the emotional facts of life, and demands a place in literature corresponding with that she occupies in society," many did not.71 A similarly complicated gender dynamic governs discussions of novel reading, for while male readers were often cast as appropriate objects of novelistic reform, female readers were more commonly described as already subject to a potentially dangerous degree of sympathy.72 As we will see, therefore, although the discourse of female influence might seem to give female novelists and readers an advantage, it did not always do so in practice.

Each of the novels I examine invokes or understands the wife/novel homology differently. In Chapter 1, on *David Copperfield* (1849–50), for example, I argue that Dickens both offers a defense of the effectiveness and desirability of "female influence," and attempts to claim that influence for the novel form. I have chosen to begin with this novel because it comes so close to offering a paradigmatic understanding of the relation between marital and readerly sympathy. Chapter 2, on *Wuthering*

Heights (1847), by contrast, examines Brontë's critique of the notions of marital sympathy and female influence. In Brontë's account, this chapter argues, the notion that marital sympathy obviates women's need for power is simply a lie told to the powerless to obscure their subjection. In place of Dickens's enthusiastic embrace of sympathy and of the wife/novel homology, therefore, Brontë uses her novel to call attention to how readerly sympathy might reproduce a dangerous deception. Chapter 3, on Eliot's The Mill on the Floss (1860), examines a very different set of concerns: rather than an illusion, as it is in Brontë's account, for Eliot, sympathy is all too real, constituting a dangerous and potentially irresponsible way for women to lose themselves in those they love. Offering less a critique of coverture, per se, than of the exclusivity of married love, Eliot reconceives of the novel as a way to both invite and interrupt such all-absorbing forms of sympathy. Chapter 4, on Collins's The Woman in White (1859-60), returns us to something like Dickens's optimism regarding sympathy as a way to consolidate male identity. However, in making sympathy seem like a rhetorical trick that enables one to attribute meaning to objects (like wives or characters) over which one has power, Collins, like Brontë, acknowledges that project's dependence on legal, economic, and political power. And Chapter 5 argues that Trollope's resistance to sympathy stems from a concern, particularly apparent in He Knew He Was Right (1869), about the fate of male identity in the shadow of the Married Women's Property Act of 1870, which granted married women the right to own property. Like the heroes of Collins's and Dickens's novels, Louis Trevelyan seeks to define himself through his relationship to his wife. But in the context of women's self-evident ability to think and speak for themselves, the dependency involved in that attempt becomes highly dangerous. He Knew He Was Right thus signals the beginning of the end—not of the understood comparability of love and reading, but of the overdetermination of that comparability by a legal context that claimed to absorb married women's legal identities into their husbands'. After 1870, although the notion of a "marriage of minds" remained a romantic and literary ideal, it lost its legal status.

The Marriage of Minds does trace a kind of trajectory, then, from Dickens's enthusiastic embrace of marital sympathy at a moment when coverture seemed secure, through Trollope's anxieties regarding the consequences of the Married Women's Property Act. But ultimately I am more interested in examining a series of moments in that trajectory

than in offering a definitive history of the development of sympathy in the mid-nineteenth century. The goal of this book, then, is to begin to map out some of the many ways in which the encounter between mind and mind was conceived in the nineteenth-century novel, to delineate the relations between these understandings and contemporary notions of marriage, and to demonstrate the difference it made for the "marriage of minds" to represent not just a romantic and literary ideal but a state of affairs supposedly guaranteed by law.