Dorothee Birke
Writing the Reader

linguae & litterae

Publications of the School of Language & Literature
Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies

Edited by
Peter Auer, Gesa von Essen, Werner Frick

Volume 59

Dorothee Birke

Writing the Reader

Configurations of a Cultural Practice
in the English Novel

DE GRUYTER

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations of Titles

AT   Ian McEwan, *Atonement*

DQ   Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote* (translated by Burton Raffel)

DS   Sarah Fielding, *David Simple*

FQ   Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*

MB   Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* (translated by Eleanor Marx Aveling/Paul de Man)

NA   Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*

UC   Alan Bennett, *The Uncommon Reader*

TDW Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife*

The abbreviations refer to the editions listed in the bibliography.

Part I

Chapter 1
Writing the Reader

"All writers overrate the impact of writing, or else they would choose another line of work."
(Adam Mars Jones)

"When you read a book, you're totally lost in your own private world, and society says that's a good and wonderful thing. But if you play a [computer] game by yourself, it's this weird, fucked-up socially damaging activity."
(Douglas Coupland)

Reading is dangerous. That, at least, could be the conclusion drawn from looking at some of the classics of European literature: think of Don Quijote, intemperate consumer of medieval romances and charger of windmills. Think of Emma Bovary, wanton lover of romance novels, later on adulterer and suicide. The preoccupation with fictional reading as a problem that is prevalent in so many novels has led Patrick Brantlinger (1998: 3) to charge the genre as a whole with an "inferiority complex":

> [T]he condemnation of novels by novelists characterizes the genre throughout its history. The inscription of anti-novel attitudes within novels is so common that it can be understood as a defining feature of the genre; accordingly, any fictional narrative which does not somehow criticize, parody, belittle, or otherwise deconstruct itself is probably not a novel. (Ibid.: 2)

In this study, I will argue that far from indicating an inferiority complex, the focus on cases of obsessive reading in novels is a central instrument of novelistic reflection and self-promotion. What the representation of fiction's life-changing impact suggests is, first and foremost, the central cultural importance of reading. Through figures of obsessive readers, the novel started to represent itself as a considerable influence on European cultural life.[1] At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the same motif is used to reassess the contemporary status of novel reading. Overall, at crucial points in the development of the genre, texts with reading characters have engaged with and in turn contributed to shaping con-

---

1 Michail Bakhtin and George Lukács, to name two of the most prominent voices in novel theory, have both regarded *Don Quijote* as an influential model for the novel as a genre (see Finch/Allen 1999: 771). See also e.g. Lionel Trilling's proclamation that "all prose fiction is a variation on the theme of *Don Quijote*", quoted in Armas Wilson (1999: ix), or Daniel Burt's characterization of Cervantes's novel as "the originator of the novel's hybrid form" (2004: 10).

temporary debates about the impact fictional writing might have on its audience and about desirable purposes of such writing.

This is an examination of how the novel itself participates in defining the cultural value of reading. More specifically, I am concerned with the complex ways in which writers in one particular strand of the novel's history – the novel in England – utilized the figure of the obsessive or 'quixotic' reader in order to explore and configurate the historical, sociological, ethical, psychological, and aesthetic aspects of literary reading as a cultural practice. I thereby suggest a new twist to a strand of scholarship that has, since Ian Watt's (1965 [1957]) influential narrative of the "rise of the novel" as tied to the emergence of an English middle class, explored the link between the development of a literary genre and its larger social and cultural context. While scholars since Watt have paid a great deal of attention to the question of which value systems the novel has promoted and how it has done so, I want to focus on the premises about media reception and consumption on which such ideas of the promotion of specific values are founded. This study thus takes up a trend in novel studies represented by experts of eighteenth-century fiction such as John Paul Hunter (1996) and William B. Warner (1998), who advocate a cultural-historical perspective on the novel as closely linked to specific sets of medial practices and material conditions.

In my case studies, I examine works which, at crucial points in the development of the English novel, assess and recalibrate ideas about reading as a particular kind of communication between author and reader but also as a way of being in the social world. A literary-studies approach to reading, which is mainly interested in questions of content, or in *what* is read, is linked with a media-studies approach, which, as Marshall McLuhan counselled, "considers not only the 'content' but the medium and the cultural matrix within which the particular medium operates" (McLuhan 1964: 11). By focussing on readers in action, I argue, the novels present reading fiction as a particular medial practice. They reflect on, but in turn also shape a sense of what it means to be a reader of fiction. They thus perform "cultural work" in Jane Tompkins's sense of the term: they are "engaged in solving a problem or a set of problems specific to the time in which [they were] written" (Tompkins 1986: 38) and thereby "offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself" (ibid.: xi). Tompkins's theoretical manoeuvre, characteristic of cultural studies, shifts the interest away from a text's meaning and aesthetic value and towards its connection with "the contemporary cultural discourse to which it seems most closely linked" (ibid.: 38). My study performs a further shift: I reintroduce close readings that focus on traditional literary concepts such as complexity and ambiguity, but I regard these as an integral part of the texts' cultural work rather than ends in themselves. Because the type of cultural work I am concerned with is not primarily political or ethical, as in the

case of Tompkins's examples, but deals with the status of a medial or literary practice, the aesthetic and formal features of texts must themselves be read as central parts of their design.

A foundational principle of my work is the idea that reading needs to be understood as a historically situated process – a notion that has in the past few decades been brought to the fore by work on the social history of reading by scholars such as Roger Chartier and Kate Flint. I follow, in particular, Hunter's early lead in applying an interest in the history of reading to the study of the development of the novel (e.g. Hunter 1977). Rather than taking a history-of-reading approach to particular authors and novels, however, I examine the ways in which novels themselves anticipate such approaches and thus become critical instruments or commentaries on literary practice.

By positioning the quixotic reader as an actant in a fictional world, novels can engage with reading as a contextualized social practice on many levels. Debates about reading are imported into these texts and reconfigured. An important dimension of reflection is added by the fact that the texts themselves also are artefacts designed for a particular kind of communication and consumption; that is, they are designed to be read. Both content and form of these works, then, need to be understood as working together to negotiate views of what it means to be a reader of fiction. These views have varied widely over the course of 250 years: as any historian of the novel will readily point out, in the eighteenth century in particular the novel as a genre was in the bull's eye of criticism on media consumption and triggered anxieties very similar to those that today centre on the use of TV, the internet, or computer games. Its detractors attacked it for fostering "reading fever",[2] for encouraging idleness, for inciting violent behaviour,[3] for draining its recipients' ability to concentrate,[4] and for stimulating erotic and sexual desire.[5] Promoting the novel as having a beneficial influence on the development of the individual has involved a rebuttal of such ideas as well as the strategy of aligning the novel with more valued literary models. Whether viewed mainly as continuing a religious tradition of edification through moral examples, or in the wake of Enlightenment thought as an integral part of a humanist education, novel reading was situated within larger discourses on psycho-social development.[6] At the

---

2 For a discussion of the "Lesefieber" debates, see Schenda (1977: 507–566); Littau (2006: 39–45).

3 See e.g. Stang (1959: 75–6); Brantlinger (1998: 142–143).

4 See e.g. Samuel Smiles (1897 [1859]).

5 See e.g. John Paul Hunter (1977: 466–468).

6 An exemplary discussion of discourses on the benefits of early eighteenth-century leisure reading – of which the novel became an important staple in the course of the eighteenth century –

beginning of the twenty-first century, conversely, novel reading is often seen as a practice that compares favourably to other medial activities. Anxieties are expressed about the perceived *decline* of novel reading. Once again, then, reading has become a focal point of cultural debate – this time, however, as a (supposedly) endangered practice rather than as a problematic activity.

Studies on reading as a contextualized practice have tended to focus on particular periods of time, whether the late eighteenth century as in Joe Bray's *The Female Reader in the English Novel from Burney to Austen* (2009), the nineteenth century as in Patrick Brantlinger's *The Reading Lesson* (1998), or the twenty-first century as in Jim Collins's *Bring On the Books for Everybody* (2010). By juxtaposing configurations of the reader figure in the early days of the novel and at the transition to the digital age, I want to shed light on how today's thinking about novel reading is shaped by earlier models as well as by the particular medial conditions of our time.

By concentrating on selected case studies from critical periods in the history of the English novel rather than sketching a broader panorama of continuous development, my study combines some of the advantages of a diachronic and a synchronic approach. The focus on a few selected works allows me to show in detail how content and form are interwoven at a particular point in time and how a specific work is not only a reflection of its contemporary context but also a palimpsest of earlier literary and extra-literary discourses. The survey of works from different centuries makes it possible to examine in how far each work represents time-specific attitudes towards the reading of fiction and in how far it registers persisting concerns.

My project takes as its point of departure the 1750s, a time when the novel as a genre was gaining momentum. Against the backdrop of then current literary successes such as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748–1751) and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) presents a reworking of Cervantes's narrative which confronts the question of the moral effects and responsibility of fiction. My first case study examines Lennox's novel as a particularly comprehensive and intricate representation of fictional reading as a controversial activity in this early stage of the development of the English novel. A time in which the novel had already assumed a central, albeit highly contested, cultural position, in turn, is reflected in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (published in 1817, but mainly written in the late 1790s), which is at the centre of my second case study. The golden age of the novel as both critically respected and

---

can be found in Blaicher (1994). He discusses the development of ideas on reading as a means of personal improvement in the work of John Locke, Joseph Addison, and Richard Steele.

firmly grounded in the mainstream of Victorian culture is the literary-historical context of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* (1864). This text engages the quixotic plot in order to confront renewed anxieties about literary reading that were, amongst other factors, raised by the rapid expansion of the printing industry and the popular success of subgenres like the sensation novel.

While the first three case studies explore three crucial phases in the rise and the establishment of novel reading as a central cultural practice, the second part of my textual analysis is concerned with the aftermath of this legacy in the medial landscape of the present time. It centres on two twenty-first-century novels which use quixotic plots to contemplate the current status of novel reading: Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) and Alan Bennett's *The Uncommon Reader* (2007). I will show that those two works re-assess the questions of the effects and purposes of reading that were raised in earlier stages of the novel's history in order to promote the value of novel reading by means of distinctly different strategies.

The novels I examine in my case studies reflect the changing status of the novel as a genre – from its early establishment as a new format of writing to its current role as a revered cultural classic. They use the quixotic figure of the obsessive reader to reflect on the effects and purposes of fictional reading in general, but also more specifically on the place of their own particular mode of writing at a specific point in history. In so doing, they centrally participate in the self-definition and continual self-reinvention of the novel as a genre.

I have already outlined the way in which my project builds on and adds to a cultural-historical understanding of literary texts as representing reading as a social practice. My interest in their cultural work, as I have already suggested, also entails an aesthetic approach: it is my contention that these texts 'write' the reading of fiction partly by utilizing and reflecting on their own status as instances of communication. The cultural-historical perspective on reading therefore needs to be fused with a perspective that is informed by theories of narrative and reception. In this way, I hope to get closer to an assessment of how the texts relate to their own audiences. What complicates this task is the fact that there are as many different concepts of 'the reader' as there are theorists (see Willand 2014: 48), and that many of these theories are based on premises about a fictional text's handling of its reader that I wish to examine critically. Before I start on my case studies, I will therefore develop a model of the different reading stances featured *in* literary texts and discuss how these relate to the actual reader *of* the text.

Although I am focussing each of my chapters closely on one particular work of fiction, I do not treat these works as stand-alone phenomena. My aim is to show how each of these novels works as a microcosm and is intricately connected with larger contexts that are themselves interlocked: how each work incorporates, condenses, reflects on specific other fictional and nonfictional works, larger con-

temporary debates on the purpose and effects of reading, as well as the current literary-historical status of the novel as a genre. I am going to demonstrate that in many ways, reading fiction in these works is represented not just as processing and reacting to a certain type of information, but also as an activity conditioned by various contexts and embedded in particular social configurations.

Four Approaches to Reading

Studies on the topic of reading in general and inquiries into representations of fictional readers in particular have tended to focus either on reading as an interpretive practice *or* on its social dimensions. In the scholarship on texts featuring 'quixotic' readers, the paradigm of reading as interpretation has been especially dominant, with a focus on the effects that particular plots have on the characters who try to emulate them (e.g. Wolpers 1986, Marx 1995). This aspect of reading is certainly also important to my own inquiry into reader figurations as reflections on the status of the novel. What makes novels featuring obsessive readers particularly interesting, however, is that they link such an approach to reading to an exploration of the multi-facetted aspects of reading as a socially embedded activity. In order to examine how these different perceptions of reading as a phenomenon relate to each other, I propose to differentiate between four major ways of approaching the issue of reading, which have been in the focus of different traditions of scholarship: reading can be regarded as a cognitive process, an embodied act, social behaviour or an institutionalized practice.

Probably the most influential approach to reading in the context of literary studies has been to view it as a cognitive process: as the act of scanning a text's words and sentences and thereby deciphering or interpreting it. This understanding of reading foregrounds the particular content of a text. It informs those branches of literary studies that are concerned with interpretation. While all interpretation theory is based on this understanding of reading, the figure of the reader has in turn come to be seen as *the* central instance of the production of a text's meaning in reception-oriented branches of interpretation theory from the 1970s onwards, most influentially in Hans Robert Jauss's and Wolfgang Iser's reception aesthetic approaches and in reader-response criticism in the vein of Stanley Fish and Roland Barthes.[7]

---

[7] For an overview of more recent developments in reader-centred literary studies see Bennett (1995), Machor/Goldstein (2001), Machor/Goldstein (2008), and Brosch (2013a). A comprehensive discussion of the development from classical reader response theory such as Iser's and Fish's towards more recent cognitive approaches, in particular involving schema theory and discourse

Approaches that consider reading as a cognitive process usually entail the understanding of reading as an act of communication: to a greater or lesser degree, they may consider the reader's status as a recipient, and inquire into his or her relation to the message and its producer. Narrative theory, with its focus on models of narrative mediation, is primarily invested in this perspective on reading, paying particular attention to the different levels of sending and receiving that are involved in literary communication. While the central entity in such narratological models is usually not the reader but the text itself as an artefact, the focus has shifted in cognitive narratology: proponents of this branch of narrative theory regard the reader, or rather the mental processes by which he or she makes sense of a text, as their central field of inquiry.

A second possibility of approaching reading is to consider it as an embodied act: as physically manifest behaviour, or an act affecting a subject's body. This may at first sight seem counter-intuitive insofar as reading appears to be a physical activity only in a very limited sense, with the reader usually stationary and focused on non-material entities. Such a view of the reader, however, is to some extent biased: Karin Littau, in *Theories of Reading* (2006), argues that there has been a tendency in literary theories of the twentieth century to focus on the reader's mind and thus on cognitive operations, which has led to a neglect of his or her body as a subject of critical inquiry. Littau pleads for the development of literary theories that include "bodily responses to literature" (2006: 156), "sensations" (2006: 155), and "involuntary responses [...] registered by the body before the reader is able to respond intellectually" (ibid.). From a historical point of view, the aspects Littau wants to bring back into view for a long time played a dominant role in discussions about novel reading. Critics both in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were much concerned with the effects of reading on the body – pornography is only one especially prominent example; the concern with the reader's physical posture is another.[8] A further important implication of highlighting this aspect of reading is the attention it calls to the emotional impact a book can have on its reader.[9] Considering reading as an embodied act also draws

---

analysis, is provided by Strasen (2008). The matter is much complicated by the fact that each theory has a different concept of "the reader" – I will return to this issue in the next chapter.

8 Kelly Mays, for example, traces the anxieties concerning reading as a bad (physical) habit in the second half of the nineteenth century (1995). Thomas Laqueur, in *Solitary Sex* (2004), perceives a close link between the eighteenth-century 'invention' of masturbation as a moral problem and the rise of private reading as a source of "unpoliced pleasure" (2004: 315).

9 It seems worth noting, however, that the subject of 'emotion' is a prime example showing that the juxtaposition of body and mind as pinpointed by Littau is highly debatable. While 'emotion' might be understood as an instinctive physical reaction, recent research tends to perceive it as the

attention to the reader as a person situated in a particular time, at a particular place, with a particular gender, social background and so on – aspects of reading that may also be considered when looking at reading as a cognitive process but that are easier to overlook when reading is regarded in this more abstract sense.[10]

A third way of understanding the phenomenon of reading is to regard it in its function as social behaviour. This may again not be an obvious take on reading, as there is a strong tendency towards envisaging readers as solitary figures, isolated from their environment. Notably, however, such a view of readers already conceives of them in terms of social interaction (even if, in this case, in negative terms, i.e. the lack of social interaction). When describing or evaluating reading from this vantage point, one uses different terms from those used for judging reading as interpretation: the focus of interest is no longer on the contents of a particular book and the way in which they are processed but on the forms of sociability that are enabled or limited by the act of reading. This is the perspective that has informed the history of reading approaches since the 1970s, where reading as social behaviour has been a central focus. Scholars like Roger Chartier (1994 [1992]), Robert Darnton (2001), Rolf Engelsing (1973), Alberto Manguel (1996), and Rudolf Schenda (1977) emphasize the plurality of reading practices and their embeddedness in specific historical and cultural contexts.[11] With the

---

result of conscious reflection and thus as associated with the notion of reading as a cognitive process: "For many years, affective psychology – the psychology of emotion – was widely seen as an entirely separate field from cognitive psychology. Feeling was viewed as something non-cognitive. However, in the past decade or so, emotion has become an increasingly important topic in cognitive science. Far from being the opposite of thought, emotion is now viewed as intimately bound up with thought, to such an extent that one cannot fully understand cognition without understanding emotion, and one cannot fully understand emotion without understanding cognition" (Hogan 2003: 14). Instead of assigning one invariable position to 'emotional response' among the approaches towards reading, then, I will, in my case studies, ask how the notion of emotion is handled in particular cases and whether it is framed in terms of involuntary physical responses or of conscious reflection (or both).

10 As Renate Brosch (2013b: 8) points out, reception theory in general has in recent years tended to move away from an abstract to a more "pragmatic, empirical or functional" concept of the reader, which has prompted scholars to distinguish between "the immediate reading experience" (which can also be considered in its physical dimensions) and "hermeneutical acts of interpretation" (which cannot).

11 See also Chartier/Cavallo 1999a and Raven/Small/Tadmor 1996. For example, in their programmatic introduction to *Storia della lettura nel mondo occidentale* (1995), a volume that describes reading practices from ancient Greece to today, Roger Chartier and Guglielmo Cavallo emphasize the multitude of factors that need to be considered for an adequate analysis of reading in history, including the histories of media technology and material objects as well as the histories of the gestures, habits, and spaces shaping individual acts of reading (see 1999b: 12–13). Some-

rise of the digital humanities, the field has been re-energized by new corpora such as the *Reading Experience Database* (first released 2007), which collates accounts of individual reading experiences and behaviour between 1450 and 1945.

Last but not least, reading must also be understood as an institutionalized practice. The perceived value of reading is to a significant extent tied to the development of specialized systems such as the publishing industry, the journals and magazines involved in the establishment of professional criticism, the educational system and so on. Reading in this sense is embedded within larger social power structures. Issues that come into view if one takes this approach to reading are, for example, the connections between particular practices of production and consumption and ascriptions of literary value. Another central field of inquiry is the role that factors such as gender or class play in canon formation, or more generally in the status of certain kinds of reading (from particular genres to works by particular authors) at specific points in time. The sociology of reading is the main discipline that is concerned with such questions. Classics of the field include Pierre Bourdieu's theory of reading (and other practices) as ways of accumulating cultural capital in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979).

This aspect is obviously related to that of reading as social behaviour, and the historiography of reading has also concerned itself with aspects of the institutionalization of reading, tracing the development of phenomena such as libraries, publishing houses, and literary magazines. Moreover, Chartier and Cavallo argue, historians have to a certain extent always also engaged with a more sociological view of reading, even though this has mainly been restricted to an interest in the key question of what access different social groups have had to different kinds of literature (1999b: 14–15). Chartier/Cavallo themselves, however, plead for a more complex view: as they point out, class is only one among many factors determining what and how people read at different times in history (they mention gender, age, and religion as further important aspects). The fourth approach, then, can to a certain extent be seen as a meta-perspective on the third one: it pays attention to the larger forces that affect reading as social behaviour and that shape our evaluations of different kinds of reading.

While the four approaches to reading have many points of intersection, most of the scholarship on reading has tended to prioritize one vantage point. Those studies on reading which have most shaped my thinking on the subject, however,

---

what ironically, given the work's focus on historical and cultural plurality, the title of the German translation confirms Michael Giesecke's thesis that there has been a wide-spread tendency to regard reading in universalizing terms (see 2007: 203): *Die Welt des Lesens: Von der Schriftrolle zum Bildschirm* (1999) omits the geographical limitation indicated in the Italian title.

have provided some ideas as to how different approaches can be fused, thus raising awareness of the interplay of very different considerations that influence widely accepted notions concerning reading. I will conclude the section with a brief survey of those fusions of approaches that have been most important to my own.

A groundbreaking treatment of the problem of the relation between reading as a cognitive process and reading as social behaviour is provided in Janice Radway's study *Reading the Romance* (1984). Radway's aim was to explore the significance of contemporary romance fiction for a small circle of female readers in the American Midwest in the early 1980s. In the course of her research, she was faced with a major challenge: how to evaluate the women's fascination with those books. Earlier feminist studies on romance reading had focused on reading as interpretation and had thus arrived at a mainly negative assessment of romances as reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. Radway wanted to investigate this feminist perspective further but also to take seriously the perspective of the women readers and their enthusiasm for the books. She therefore introduced an additional scale of evaluation by considering reading also as social behaviour. This allowed her to take into account the women's own impression that their pastime constituted a declaration of independence, time taken off from domestic duties. *Reading the Romance* thus provides a complex discussion of the various vantage points from which a certain type of reading might be perceived and subsequently evaluated as 'good' or 'bad'.

Obviously, my own approach to the subject differs greatly from Radway's, not least because she uses ethnographic methods to study "the way romance reading as a form of behavior operated as a complex intervention in the ongoing social life of *actual social subjects*" (Radway 1991: 7; emphasis added), whereas I deal with representations of such reading behaviour in fiction.[12] However, I find her aim to explore, rather than marginalize or even ignore, seemingly contradictory intuitions about reading as a pastime to be congenial to the way in which the texts I examine represent reading. They also, as I am going to show in my case studies, tend to foreground the clashes between ways of understanding reading and the implications of the different scales of evaluation that are involved.

---

12 Not only does *Reading the Romance* spell out the difference between reading as interpretation and reading as social behaviour, but it also touches upon reading as an institutionalized practice. Its first chapter deals with the publishing industry involved in the production of the romances. This is presented as a frame for the findings about the real romance readers, but it is not discussed as an alternative way of understanding and evaluating the phenomenon of reading itself, and there is not much discussion of possible interrelations with the other two views on reading.

Another highly productive fusion of different approaches to reading is proposed by Jane Tompkins, who in her programmatic essay "The Reader in History" calls for a historical contextualization of the 'reading as communication' paradigm that is so central to reader response theory and narratology. As Tompkins sees it, by focusing on the meaning of individual texts (in my terminology, solely concentrating on reading as a cognitive act), these approaches detract attention from the social and political function of reading as interactional behaviour (i.e., reading as social behaviour and institutionalized practice). This trend, she argues, corresponds to a shift in literature itself: the "process of separation between literature and political life [...] begins to occur in the second half of the eighteenth century when the breakdown of the patronage system, the increase in commercial printing, and the growth of a large reading public change the relation of authors to their audiences" (Tompkins 1980b: 214). The genre of the novel, in particular, is the expression of a new notion of literature as "both impersonal and privatized" (ibid.): authors no longer have personal contact with their readership, while at the same time subgenres like the sentimental novel reflect the idea that reading has a strong emotional effect on the individual. Works of literature, in other words, are perceived both as products of changing reading practices, and as themselves shaping such changes. Abstract communication models like the one offered by narratology, Tompkins cautions, should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the social parameters of the actual communication practised by authors and audiences as well as the understanding of how such communication works change over time. I am convinced that authors of novels – and in particular, authors writing in critical periods of the genre's history – are acutely aware of these shifts. In my case studies, I demonstrate how author-reader communication is reflected on as a problem within fiction.

Tompkins's call for a contextualizing approach to the act of reading within literary studies has since been followed by a number of scholars, among them Patrick Brantlinger (1998), Joe Bray (2009), Kate Flint (1993), the contributors of a volume edited by Paul Goetsch (1994), Jacqueline Pearson (1999), and a few others who will figure at various points in the following chapters. My study is a contribution to this larger project insofar as I chart the ways in which novels themselves – both through their form and their content – reflect the changing social and institutional contexts in which novel writers and their readers interact. My focus on the fictional works themselves, their techniques and their complex participation in the larger social conversation about reading, however, entails a main difference between my approach and that of the works just listed, which (with the exception of Bray) primarily focus on the social and historical contexts and consider a broad panorama of different literary texts.

As Tompkins rightly points out, the field of narratology has traditionally tended towards conceptualizing reading mainly in the decontextualized, fairly abstract sense of reading as a cognitive act.[13] However, postclassical narratologists in particular have worked towards an integration of the kind of historical awareness she calls for in her article. In particular, feminist narrative theory has linked the focus on reading as an act of communication in an abstract sense to an inquiry into historical and sociological contexts. Susan Lanser's *Fictions of Authority* (1992) and Robyn Warhol's *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (1989), to name but two of the most important works, have demonstrated how concepts which had been developed to examine communicative positions (such as that of the 'implied author' and the 'implied reader') can and should be historicized and contextualized. Lanser's and Warhol's work calls attention to the role that (historically variable) gender roles and social distributions of power play in authorial self-representations (Lanser) and reader address (Warhol). It demonstrates how we can understand narrative technique as a historically evolving phenomenon that is tied to social context and has thus laid the foundation for a more culturally aware strand of narratology which also informs more recent work, such as Paul Dawson's study on the functions of omniscient narration in contemporary fiction (2009).

The attention to the historicized and contextualized character of narrative form is an important guideline for my own understanding of how novels can function as self-reflexive commentary on the specific possibilities and limitations of literary communication. Another way in which my study intersects with the work by Lanser and Warhol is in our awareness of gender as a central category in socio-historical developments. This does not mean that I am primarily interested in charting differences between male and female readers. What I am interested in are the larger implications of the ways in which the novels represent reading as a

---

13 An exception is the already-mentioned cognitive branch of narrative theory, which focuses on the experience of reading as a sense-making process and thus is based on an understanding of reading in a more elaborate sense. Scholars of cognitive narrative theory are, as David Herman puts it, interested in the "basic mental abilities and dispositions" whose examination enables inquiries into the "interconnection between narrative and mind" (Herman 2012: 17). My own study is informed by some cognitive narratological ideas, such as the emphasis on the way in which fictional texts appeal to a reader's store of literary and extra-literary knowledge or the premise that one should pay attention to the sequence in which information is conveyed in a text, as this has an impact on the way in which it will be experienced by a reader (i.e. understanding narrative as a process). I would not say, however, that I myself 'do' cognitive narratology in this book, as I do not attempt to spell out readers' sense-making processes in terms of schema theory or similar approaches.

gendered activity – an interest that is fuelled by the conspicuous role of woman readers in novels that feature an obsessive consumption of fiction.

The Significance of the Quixotic Reader's Gender

One important feature shared by the novels I discuss in my case studies is that they all centre on female protagonists. This is remarkable because obsessive readers, in fiction as well as in real life, can obviously be men or women. Male characters who have been regarded as heirs of Don Quijote include Christoph Martin Wieland's Don Sylvio, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Werther, Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer, Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray and Thomas Mann's Adrian Leverkühn (see e.g. Marx 1995, Wolpers 1986a). Nonetheless, in the English context, the protagonists that best fit the mould of the 'quixotic' reader at critical times in the history of the novel are female: Lennox's Arabella, Austen's Catherine Morland, Braddon's Isabel Sleaford, McEwan's Briony Tallis, and Bennett's Queen Elizabeth. The novels in which they feature are, in contrast to works such as Twain's *Tom Sawyer* or Conrad's *Lord Jim*, explicitly and extensively concerned not just with primarily cognitive issues of misreading, but also with the social function and influence of books, and with the representation of reading as a pastime.

The prominence of women as representative models in discourses on novel reading in general seems particularly striking when one considers that the default representatives for most cultural processes have for a long time been male. As Jacqueline Pearson writes in her study on *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750–1835*: "What surprises me most is simply the ubiquity of the woman reader in discourses of all kinds – of gender and sexuality, education, economics, class, 'race', social stability and revolution, science, history and so on. The woman reader is a key icon for this period" (Pearson 1999: 220). Pearson's observation holds true also for later periods. The interest in the woman reader does not fade away in the course of the nineteenth century – she remains a prominent figure in literature and also in the visual arts,[14] as attested to by the ongoing popularity of items like the "Women and Reading" calendars that are sold in every bookstore.

The attributes that make readers 'quixotic' are to a large extent conventionally coded as feminine in patriarchal Western societies: readers typically are represented as becoming obsessive because they are naïve about the workings of

---

[14] Many iconic images of readers in paintings show female subjects – see e.g. the compilation in Garrett Stewart's *The Look of Reading* (2006).

the world that surrounds them; because they are impressionable, even to the point of hysteria; and, more prosaically, because they have a great deal of leisure time that allows them to immerse themselves in books. One might say that in all those cases where reading is not understood primarily in the light of a rational pursuit of knowledge but associated with aspects such as consumption, leisure, the body, emotional involvement, identification or immersion, the typical reader is much more likely to be coded as female (or at least as feminine or feminized).[15] Theodor Wolpers, whose edited volume is not particularly concerned with issues of gender theory, notes that the female version of the Quixote has been the more productive one in literary history and speculates that this has to do with the novel genre's identification with the exploration of emotions and the inner self from Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* onwards (see Wolpers 1986b: 25).

The gender inversion in the title of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, the starting point for my own analysis, is, in this light, no surprising move but the reworking of a common stereotype.[16] Lennox's contemporary Henry Fielding highlighted the central importance of gender in cultural images of the reader in his comparison of the works by Cervantes and Lennox:

> [A]s we are to grant in both Performances, that the Head of a very sensible Person is entirely subverted by reading Romances, this Concession seems to me more easy to be granted in the Case of a young Lady than of an old Gentleman. [...] To say Truth, I make no Doubt but that most young Women of the same Vivacity, and of the same innocent Disposition, in the same Situation, and with the same Studies, would be able to make a large Progress in the same Follies. (Fielding 1970: 193)

Fielding's approval of Lennox's achievement, which he labels a "most extraordinary and most excellent Performance", then, appears as a somewhat backhanded compliment to his female colleague insofar as she is supposed to have paid tribute to the 'fact' that women are more likely to become silly readers than men (and, presumably, to be drawn to silly books in the first place). At the same time, Fielding suggests that the very same group that may be most vulnerable to the possible danger of literature is also the one that can benefit most from reading: *The Female Quixote,* he writes, "will afford very useful Lessons to all those young Ladies who will peruse it with proper Attention" (1970: 194). Women, in short,

---

15 The latter is arguably the case with male readers such as Don Sylvio and Werther.

16 As Wolpers (1986c: 134) notes, the motif of a "female Quixote" did not originate with Lennox, but he cites her novel as the first example in which this character was central to the plot of a whole narrative. This would make Lennox's Arabella the first "female Quixote" in the sense in which I am employing the term: not just an example of a silly or obsessive reader who is an object of ridicule, but an ambivalent and complex figure.

may be seen as novel readers *par excellence*: they appear to be most likely to profit from or be adversely affected by their engagement with fictional narrative.

Fielding's point – that reading is to some extent a gender-specific activity – has since been critically investigated by feminist criticism. Kate Flint's influential *The Woman Reader: 1837–1914* (1993) inquires into the gender politics of reading.[17] What is central to her examination is not the question whether (or why, or how) women in fact do (or did) read differently from men, but an examination of the cultural purposes the *construction* of the woman reader serves at a particular point in time. Flint analyses a wide range of texts discussing how women read, what they should read and so on. For her, controversies surrounding the issue of women's reading are important because they show how notions about gender roles are negotiated and cemented:

> Attempts to legislate about reading and its effects can be seen on the one hand as a means of gaining control over subjectivity, and, on the other, as a means of obtaining access to different types of knowledge, and through this, to different social expectations and standards. Thus, recognizing the potency of 'the woman reader' as a subject within cultural discussion is not a self-sufficient end. It illuminates important networks of ideas about the presumed interrelations of mind, body, and culture. It shows how notions about reading fed off attempts to define women's mental capacities and tendencies through their physical attributes, and, in turn, appeared to contribute to the validation of these very definitions. Furthermore, it demonstrates contradictions and paradoxes which inhered within nineteenth-century notions of gender. (Flint 1993: 11)

Flint's argument that to look at reading means to look at "presumed interrelations of mind, body and culture" is well taken and delineates a path of inquiry that I will also follow in my own study. At the same time, my own interest differs from Flint's in a significant way: in Flint's book, the discussion of the peculiarities of female as opposed to male reading – or rather, of the different ways in which such peculiarities have been constructed – is analysed as an important contribution to the larger struggle over gender difference. Generally speaking, Flint's work is concerned with the question of what it is that notions of 'typically female' reading tell us about gender politics at a certain point in time (and how they contribute to the construction of gender roles). By contrast, my own work centres on the

---

17 Pearson's *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750–1835* (1999) can be read as a prequel to Flint's study. Catherine Golden in her 2003 book *Images of the Woman Reader in Victorian British and American Fiction* focuses on roughly the same time period as Flint but offers a transatlantic comparison of representations in fiction. Joe Bray, in a more recent update of the 'woman reader' question, again goes back to the late eighteenth century and focuses on the variety of reading practices that are attributed to female reading (*The Female Reader in the English Novel: From Burney to Austen*, 2009).

ongoing conversation about the potential effects of reading fiction and the role the gendering of the quixotic reader plays in this context. My main question, then, is not what discourses on reading tell us about views on women and gender relations (which is what both Pearson and Flint are mainly interested in),[18] but what discourses on (women) readers tell us about the contested cultural role of novel reading.

Nancy Armstrong, in her revision of Watt's 'rise of the novel' theory, makes the controversial case that the central project of the novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries involved the construction of "the modern individual [as] first and foremost a woman" (1987: 8). She argues that women writers were primarily responsible for the creation of a new ideal of femininity associated with interiority, moral norms and domesticity and then for positing this ideal as a new model of subjectivity (ibid.: 4–7). The norm of femininity that was thus created was successful mainly because novels came to be an integral part of the education system and "fiction could accomplish much the same purpose as the various forms of recreation promoted by Sunday schools" (ibid.: 17).

Armstrong's work provides a very interesting template for thinking about the relations between novels, readers, and gendered ideals. She regards novels as powerful instruments for inculcating norms; in her account, the ideal woman that is constructed in the novels is, on the one hand, a model conferring agency to women (since she represents the norm of femininity); on the other hand, the model detracts from female agency insofar as it promotes a depoliticized ideal. Like Radway, then, Armstrong seems to believe that fictional texts can empower their female audiences at the same time at which they are impairing them. It is precisely the self-reflexive exploration of such ambivalent effects, I will argue, that lies at the heart of novels about obsessive readers: the quixotic plot lays out the reader's power as well as her impotence.

The Quixotic Plot

I have already made free use of the adjective 'quixotic' to describe those reading protagonists whose sense of reality, like Don Quijote's, is dramatically changed – one might even say, warped – by their avid interest in fictional narrative.[19] It is

---

18 As Pearson puts it, "women's writing as well as reading become significant issues in a battle of the sexes for cultural authority" (1999: 218).

19 In English, two alternate spellings can be found for Cervantes's novel and protagonist: 'Quixote' and 'Quijote'. 'Quixote' is the variant that has been used most widely through the last centuries, though the recent trend is to restore the original Spanish spelling 'Quijote' (as in the

important to emphasize, though, that I use this label to describe more than just the use of a particular motif. I call texts which employ the figure of the quixotic reader in a particular way 'quixotic novels' in order to highlight their participation in a novel-specific tradition of reflections about reading. I do not regard the quixotic novel as a genre in its own right. In terms of genre, the novels I am examining in this study are perhaps best described as related to the *bildungsroman*, insofar as they chart the impact of reading on the development of an individual. My main interest, however, has not been in charting a genre history, but in discussing how a particular plot pattern is employed in otherwise quite diverse texts in order to reflect on the status of reading as a complex activity.

Quixotic novels 'write readers' in several senses. They present extraordinary reading experiences on the level of the story. They pick up, take sides in, complicate or modify ongoing contemporary debates about media consumption. Moreover, I also see them as paradigmatic cases of how novels seem to presuppose or evoke certain attitudes on the part of their audiences: in quixotic novels, the level of the discourse is foregrounded, since these works prompt the question of how they themselves as rhetorical and aesthetic artefacts compare to the books that are read by the protagonists.[20] In my discussion of narratological ways of describing the reader as a figure in chapter 2, I will engage more closely with this level of 'writing the reader'.

Cervantes's *Don Quijote* is exemplary in combining the four approaches to reading outlined above. The two volumes (published 1605 and 1615, respectively) feature a protagonist whose obsessive interest in books leads to many conflicts and adventures, as he insists on seeing himself as a knight from a medieval romance. Reading as a cognitive process, in other words, is the mainspring of all that happens on the level of the story. Different worlds – the reality in which the reading protagonist lives and the world about which he reads – collide, and Cervantes's work examines the influence the latter exerts on the former in Don

translation by Burton Raffel from 1995). I employ the Spanish spelling 'Quijote' when referring to Cervantes's work or original character, and the English variant 'Quixote' – which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, has found its way into the English language in coinages such as 'quixotic', 'quixotish', 'quixotism', and 'quixotry' – when referring to the later tradition, i.e. the type or typical features represented by this character, or his literary heirs.

20 The story-discourse distinction (see especially Chatman 1978) is a complex and controversial narratological issue. I do not wish to participate in the theoretical debate surrounding it but employ it as a heuristic distinction to roughly distinguish different aspects of the texts I am interested in. In my usage I follow the systematic suggestion by Monika Fludernik (2006: 10) to subsume Genette's *narration* and *discours* under the heading of 'discourse'.

Quijote's lived experiences. Reading in a literal sense is thus figuratively extended: Quijote's reading of books leads to a changed 'reading' of the world.

Moreover, insofar as reading is also staged as an act and an experience on the level of the story, it entails the evocation of other approaches. Reading as an embodied act is, for example, addressed through a theme that constitutes an important comic element in the text (often taken up in visual representations of the protagonist): Quijote, as a bookworm, is not well equipped to face the skirmishes he seeks. Both physically and in terms of his gear (his armour, his horse), he is the opposite of a well-trained and fit warrior. This contrast raises the question of the physical effects of reading as well as that of the relation between body and mind.

Similarly, the focus on reading on the level of the story serves to explore its function as social behaviour. Don Quijote's preoccupation with books clearly sets him apart from the people surrounding him, who do not share his interest. The special status it accords him is ambivalent, as it can be interpreted either as errant madness or as pardonable idealism – a point that opens up debates about the constitution of values and norms. In any case, what is central is that the work represents the impact of an obsessive way of reading on social interaction.

Reading as an institutionalized practice features on the level of the story when, for example, in the famous "inquisition into the library" (DQ 34), the barber and the priest engage in a discussion about the value of specific books in Don Quijote's possession in order to determine which of these should be burnt as dangerous reading. Their conversation takes up contemporary debates concerning the status of different genres of writing as well as of specific works. Another instance that shows how the novel touches upon institutional aspects of literature is a scene in which Don Quijote enters a printing shop and is involved in a discussion about the production and consumption of books, thus reflecting on some of the material and technological foundations of reading as an institutionalized practice. And, last but not least, an interest in the literary system as an institution in its own right is shown by the large number of intertextual references (both on the level of the story and on the level of the discourse), which evoke a long tradition of writing and emphasize that Cervantes's novel itself stands in complex relations to a large number of other works. Wolfgang G. Müller has pointed out that the description of Quijote's cognitive reading phase is mainly limited to the first chapter of the novel, in which the origin of his delusion is described (2010: 191). His argument that the reading theme nonetheless represents a crucial kernel of the text is supported not only by the fact that the concrete reading scene is implicitly taken up throughout the novel by the use of parodistic references to the kind of book Quijote has fallen for, but also by the many other references to books and reading as part of the characters' social world.

The handling of reading as a multi-facetted phenomenon in *Don Quijote*, then, reflects a keen interest in the effects of fictional writing on the reader – an interest that encompasses not only moral or psychological facets but also an exploration of material and social aspects of the development of literature as an institution. Crucially, this interest is linked to a self-reflexive treatment of the purposes of fictional writing, which is expressed in extensive intertextual references as well as in explicit narratorial commentary and reader address.

The works featured in my case studies are 'quixotic' insofar as they take up Cervantes's blueprint for an exploration of reading as a complex phenomenon, foregrounded on both the story and the discourse levels.[21] While the texts vary widely in their application of their shared theme, the following characteristics constitute a lowest common denominator for those texts I classify as featuring 'quixotic plots':

1   The novels focus on a protagonist who is characterized as an unusually avid reader of fiction, and whose perception of the world is strongly influenced by reading.
2   Reading is represented as a behaviour as well as a cognitive process (i.e. the actual process of reading is in some way featured in the story).
3   The protagonist's changed perception plays a central role in a conflict that drives the action.
4   The novels contain a striking number of intertextual references situating the work itself in a tradition of fictional writing and inviting comparisons to other works. At least some of those intertextual references specity the works the characters read on the level of the story – that is, the characters read and discuss books that also exist outside of the text and that therefore may be familiar to the actual reader.[22]

---

21 As the *OED* confirms, "quixotic" has become an established adjective in the English language, describing the quality of "resembling Don Quixote; hence, striving with lofty enthusiasm for visionary ideals". There is also the noun "Quixote", i.e. a person who is "inspired by lofty and chivalrous but false or unrealizable ideals". In the context of my study, this usage is of great significance insofar as it highlights the gap between the quixotic character and the society around him or her that is also at the centre of my own interest in this figure. At the same time, the popularized associations with the word tend to omit the aspect of Don Quijote's misled enthusiasm that is central to my own definition of the "quixotic plot": the fact that in Cervantes's work, this mindset is associated with *reading* in a literal sense.

22 My terminology is close to the suggestion by J.A.G. Ardila, who, in his work on the influence of Cervantes in Britain, notes that 'quixotic' has come to be used in a very broad sense to describe "anything related to Don Quixote the novel" (Ardila 2009b: 11) and in particular any character who is reminiscent of Don Quijote, but pleads for a more restricted usage: he defines "quixotic fiction" as "a narrative which relates the adventures of a Quixote – and a Quixote is an individual

The reason for calling this constellation of features a 'plot' rather than, for example, a motif, lies in the conjunction of 1) and 3): the novels that I am interested in do not only present a main character who reads obsessively but also make the relation between reading and other kinds of experience a concern that is at the root of the works' central conflict. Point 2) represents my interest in texts that go beyond featuring their protagonists' misreading as purely, or mainly, figurative.[23] Works with quixotic plots in this narrower sense are much rarer than those featuring characters who are in some way reminiscent of Cervantes's Don Quijote, even though they can still be found in many literary epochs.

In the past decade there has been a resurgence of interest in the legacy of Cervantes in European and American culture. Classic studies demonstrating the significance of Don Quijote to the development of European literature (particularly the novel) such as Robert Alter's *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (1975), Ronald Paulson's *Don Quixote in England: The Aesthetics of Laughter* (1998) and James Parr's *Don Quixote: An Anatomy of Subversive Discourse* (1988) have been complemented with collections of articles that demonstrate the impressive range of Quijote's 'afterlives' in different centuries, countries and media: *1605–2005: Don Quixote Across the Centuries*, edited by John Philip Gabriele (2005), *Europäische Dimensionen des Don Quijote in Literatur, Kunst, Film und Musik*, edited by Tilmann Altenberg and Klaus Meyer-Minnemann (2007), *Der*

---

who, through excessive reading of a certain literary genre, has become a psychotic monomaniac and hence espouses the obsolete values which that genre proclaims." To my purposes, the aspect of reading considered by Ardila is highly relevant, and in my own definition, I concentrate on those texts which follow Cervantes's text in showing the act of reading and discussions of particular books. Other critics, who have tended towards broader usages of the term, have extended it to formal aspects, like Sarah Wood, who suggests that 'Quixotic fiction' should be used to label texts that "incorporate or encounter literary genres such as Menippean satire, sentimental fiction Moorish captivities, the burlesque, the pastoral and the picaresque" (Wood 2005: 11). John Joseph Connor combines form and content: he uses structuralist theory to reduce the plot and character constellation of Don Quijote to "mobile fragments" (1977: 198) which are reconfigured in what he then calls 'quixotic novels' such as *Moby Dick*, *Middlemarch* and *The Great Gatsby*.

23 Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, to name but one example, comes close to qualifying as a quixotic work but falls short in both ways. There is an obsessive reader in a literal sense, Tom Sawyer, who involves his friends in quixotic exploits inspired by adventure novels (both at the beginning of the book, when they play at robbers, and in the final part, when Huck and Tom free Jim in a complicated procedure inspired by Tom's reading of books like *The Count of Monte Christo*). This, however, is only a side plot in the novel as a whole. Conversely, misreading is a central theme throughout the novel, as Huck is frequently mistaken in his assessments of people and situations he encounters, but these misinterpretations are not associated with book reading in a literal sense.

widerspenstige Klassiker: Don Quijote im 18. Jahrhundert (2007), edited by Klaus-Dieter Ertler and Andrea Maria Humpl, *The Cervantean Heritage: Reception and Influence of Cervantes in Britain* (2009), edited by J. A. G. Ardila, and *Don Quijotes intermediale Nachleben/Don Quixote's Intermedial Afterlives*, edited by Ines Detmers and Wolfgang G. Müller (2010a).[24] Wolfgang G. Müller has throughout his scholarly career considered manifold aspects of the Cervantean legacy, notably assessing *Don Quijote*'s role as a catalyst for narrative innovation in the English novel (2007) and tracing a rich tradition of "[t]he conversion of the literary figure of Don Quixote into pictorial images" (2014: 269). Working with a broad understanding of 'quixotic' or 'Cervantean' as encompassing any features of form and content that refer or relate to the Spanish author and his creations (especially Quijote), these studies make a compelling case for the central significance of Cervantes in European literary history.

My study shares the assumption of the significance of *Don Quijote* as a model in Western literature, or, more specifically, as a pattern for cultural self-reflection. However, my aim is not primarily that of adding another chapter to the history of the influence of Cervantes. What I am interested in is the self-positioning of the novel as a cultural artefact, and I argue that the quixotic plot as I have defined it is an important instrument in this process. Although quixotic novels have been objects of scholarly attention for a long time, the work they perform with regard to the cultural status of novel reading as a practice has not received much consideration. One reason for this is that the majority of scholars have been interested in more traditional aspects, such as the formation of genres and literary influence. Reading as a concern in *Don Quijote* is mentioned but subsequently sidelined in many studies; and those scholars who do focus on it tend to regard reading primarily from a literary-studies perspective, i.e. as a cognitive process. The first comprehensive study on quixotic *readers* in a larger European context focuses exactly on this aspect: the collection *Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur* (1986, edited by Theodor Wolpers) introduces the idea of 'lived literature' to examine the impact of the content of literary texts on Quijote and his literary heirs such as Wieland's Don Sylvio, Goethe's Werther, or Flaubert's Emma Bovary.

One of the rare studies focussing on representations of obsessive readers and emphasizing the link between such a view of reading as a cognitive act and the 'institutional practice' approach is Friedhelm Marx' *Erlesene Helden: Don Sylvio,*

---

24 Ines Detmers has also been working on a book-length study on the intermedial history of *Don Quijote* adaptations in Anglophone literatures (not yet published).

Werther, Wilhelm Meister und die Literatur (1995), which traces the motif of the quixotic hero in German literature of the late eighteenth century. Marx relates the figure of the quixotic reader to Enlightenment traditions of thought and argues that this figure represents a growing appreciation of the imagination as an important human faculty. Through this emphasis, Marx argues, plots with quixotic readers serve to elevate the previously derided genre of the novel. They do so not only on the level of the story but also on the level of the discourse, insofar as the figure of the reading character adds a self-reflexive dimension and thus a level of meaning on which reception is itself staged as a problem (see 1995: 11).

Marx's findings on German literature of the late eighteenth century correspond to my own line of argument insofar as I also see the quixotic plot as an instrument of celebrating fictional reading as much as of exploring its dangers or drawbacks. However, I regard the 'elevation' of the novel genre not as an objectively measurable increase in literary value, or the creation of a completely new kind of writing, but in the way in which Warner has described it in *Licensing Entertainment*, namely as a "conscious cultural project that gives 'the' novel an objective character", a "creative early-modern response by media workers and entertainers to the onset of market-driven media culture" (Warner 1998: xiii). Warner, though not interested in quixotic plots, suggests that "a reform of reading practices" (ibid.) is the main instrument through which this elevation is effected, and I will consider more closely in the next chapter in what ways his ideas about the role of the reader inform mine.

Another issue that needs to be examined more closely than previous readings of quixotic texts have done is the question to what extent and to what ends they represent reading as an embodied act. I have already referred to Karin Littau's complaint about the neglect of the physical aspects of reading in recent twentieth-century theory. Littau herself in her survey *Theories of Reading* includes some relatively brief examinations of literary examples – many of them quixotic readers such as Werther, Catherine Morland, and Emma Bovary – to show that in literature itself, the impact of reading on the body has often been a major topic. Prototypes of physically affected readers include, in Littau's list, stock figures such as the "weeping reader" as well as the "frightened reader" (see 2006: 69–72). Joe Bray, in his more recent *The Female Reader in the English Novel: From Burney to Austen* (2009), also highlights the significance of representations of the reader's body (quixotic and otherwise) around the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. The title of his introduction – "Texts, Bodies, Readers" – already signals the shift in interest he is proposing. In my case studies, I will take up this cue and pay particular attention to the question of how precisely these texts bring in physical dimensions of reading but also ask how they are related to the other approaches to reading, especially notions about its cognitive effects.

Various scholars have warned against understanding fictional readers as representative examples of actual historical reading practices (see e.g. Flint 1993: 14; Bray 2009: 24). In the case of most of the protagonists in quixotic novels, it is particularly obvious that their utility in this sense is questionable or at least limited: their stances towards reading are obviously extreme, and they are to some degree both literary types and embodiments of prevalent clichés about the dangers of reading. I do not, then, propose to read quixotic novels as documentaries about historical reading practices; rather, I see them as exploring a wide range of different possible ways of reading, from passive to active, compliant to resistant, isolated to shared, cognitive to physical.[25] What they all have in common is the underlying idea that fictional reading matters – not only as an individual pastime, but also as a broader cultural endeavour.

Self-Reflexivity Revisited

In the previous sections, I have argued that quixotic novels are ideal vehicles for a self-reflexive engagement with the status and potential of the novel as a genre. This argument taps into a tradition of seeing *Don Quijote* as the model case for a self-reflexive strand in the history of the novel (Alter 1975). However, the argument that quixotic novels are characterized by their foregrounding not just of reading as a cognitive act but also of the other approaches to reading also calls for a redrawing of the notion of self-reflexivity itself.

In his seminal study on what he terms "self-conscious fiction", Robert Alter begins with Cervantes's novel as the *locus classicus* and paradigm for novels that thematize "the fictionality of fictions" (1975: 3). The interest in this kind of self-reflexivity has since been pursued predominantly under the label of 'metafiction', which refers to works emphasizing "the nature of fiction as an artifice that both mirrors and refracts reality" (O'Donnell 2005: 301). Research in this area has traditionally been focused in particular on postmodernist and on eighteenth-century narrative.[26]

For Alter, the self-conscious novel expresses a "crisis of belief in the written word", an "undisguised skepticism about the status of fictions", which can be

---

25 The point that attitudes towards reading, rather than the mimetic representation of historical practices, is the main point of looking at fictional reader figures is also, for instance, highlighted by Bray (2009: 27).

26 Most notably, see Hutcheon (1980) and Waugh (1984).

juxtaposed with the "solid-seeming fictional realities" of the realist tradition (Alter 1975: 4). Cervantes's novel, however, is special, as it bridges the gap between these two modes of writing:

> One measure of Cervantes' genius is the fact that he is the initiator of both traditions of the novel; his juxtaposition of high-flown literary fantasies with grubby actuality pointing the way to the realists, his zestfully ostentatious manipulation of the artifice he constructs setting a precedent for all the self-conscious novelists to come. (Alter 1975: 4–5)

Alter's argument on the two traditions and Cervantes's special role is still an influential way of narrating the development of the novel as a genre. At the same time, the juxtaposition itself is not as stable as Alter here depicts it. Theorists of realism have pointed out that a self-reflexive exploration of representation as a challenge is also an integral part of many texts that are regarded as centrepieces of the realist tradition in the nineteenth century, such as for example the novels of George Eliot.

George Levine, who makes this point in *The Realistic Imagination*, accordingly sees Cervantes's combination as a prototype rather than as the point that initiates a bifurcation:

> There is, then, a continuing tradition of self-consciousness in realistic fiction, a tradition formally initiated in *Don Quixote*. The self-consciousness marks realism's awareness both of other literature and of the strategies necessary to circumvent it, and – at last – its awareness of its own unreality. (Levine 1981: 15)

While Levine insists on the compatibility of realism and self-reflexivity, he is, like Alter, mainly interested in the sceptical attitude towards the possibility of representation that this "awareness" expresses. Quixotic plots, I will argue, foreground a text's own status as literature. This does not mean, however, that they do so only (or even primarily) by emphasizing the 'unreality' of the fictional worlds that are depicted. A quixotic plot also explores the potential of literary representation to exert an influence on its reader, and it is often used precisely to foreground the ways in which narrative literature *becomes* an integral part of reality. What is more, once one complements the view of reading as a cognitive process with the view of reading as social behaviour and as an institutional practice, the idea that reading entails a separation between 'fiction' and 'reality' starts to appear less straightforward. The representation of books as objects and of reading as a process can invite the actual reader to reflect on the social and institutional functions of reading and books in his or her own environment, rather than only drawing attention to fictionality.

This point can be illustrated with the help of another example drawn from *Don Quijote* as interpreted by Robert Alter. Alter highlights the important function

of the physical presence of books and the literary industry in Cervantes's novel, but he clearly sees it in terms of an exposure of fictional 'unreality':

> There is a perfect appropriateness in the fact that, toward the end of Don Quixote's adventures, when he comes to Barcelona, he should stumble into a printing shop where he witnesses the processes of proof-drawing, type-setting, revision, and is treated to a disquisition on the economics of publishing and bookselling. [...] At such a moment we can hardly forget that Don Quixote himself is no more than the product of the very processes he observes, a congeries of words set up in type, run off as proof, corrected and rerun, bound in pages, and sold at so many *reales* a copy. (Alter 1975: 4–5)

I agree with the idea that the scene suggests a parallel between the books whose production Don Quijote witnesses and the book *Don Quijote* that an actual reader is holding in his or her hand. However, while it is possible that for some readers this will evoke the protagonist's fictionality, it might also have the opposite effect: for other readers, the descriptions of the printing shop (like the scenes in which Quijote reads) may produce reality effects and highlight continuities between Quijote's and the actual reader's own experience as a connoisseur of books as cultural productions. One important point in the examination of the quixotic novels in the case studies will be to keep track of such possible functions and their relation.

A sound foundation for this exploration can be found in the works of German and Austrian narratologists, who have in the past two decades developed important refinements to theories of self-reflexive writing. Werner Wolf has analysed the different ways in which metafictional elements disrupt narrative illusion and has pointed out that reflection in metafiction can refer to rather different aspects of the artificial character of fictional narrative: "*fictum*-Metafiktion" comments on the truth value of the elements of the narrated world (foregrounding them as *inventions*), while "*fictio*-Metafiktion" foregrounds textuality and mediality, the status of the text as an object that has been crafted, without highlighting the invention of the objects it describes (see Wolf 2001a: 72). Ansgar Nünning, in turn, has introduced the concept of "metanarration" in order to characterize passages that focus on the act of narrating rather than on the question of whether the resulting product is an invention.[27]

---

[27] Nünning's German term is "Metanarration" (2001b; 2001c). Fludernik (2003b: 10–15) discusses the difficulties involved in transferring the terms "Metafiktion" and "Metanarration" from German into English; I am following her suggestion to translate the German noun "Metanarration" as "metanarration" (English adjective: "metanarrative"), rather than using "metanarrative" as a noun in English.

As Nünning points out, metanarration very often does not have the effect of disrupting illusion; on the contrary, references to the act of narration can evoke the 'secondary' illusion of an actual storyteller who relates a tale to an audience. While he does not make a distinction here (2001c: 28) between cases with a homodiegetic narrator (such as Marlowe in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*) and a heterodiegetic narrator (as in the case of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*), the dissimilarities between these two scenarios are important in the context of my study. In the case of *Heart of Darkness*, a specific fictional situation is sketched which is clearly separable from that of Conrad writing *Heart of Darkness*: Marlowe sits in a boat and talks to an actual audience. In the case of *Tom Jones*, in contrast, what we learn about the narrator is compatible with the scenario of an author writing the novel the actual reader is holding in his or her hand.

This 'mimesis of narrative', then, does not create an 'illusion' in the same way that the one in Conrad's novel does because it can be read as referring to the medial act the actual reader is engaging in when reading *Tom Jones*. Not only does it reflect on narration, but also on reading a novel as a specific medial practice.[28] I therefore agree with Monika Fludernik's plea that when studying functions of metanarration, the distinction between hetero- and homodiegetic narratives should be a primary concern (Fludernik 2003b: 31). While in heterodiegetic narration, metanarrative comments can usually be read as self-reflexive about the fictional narrative or literary artefact the actual reader is perusing, i.e. about novel-ness itself, in the case of homodiegetic narration they often refer to narrative as an extraliterary phenomenon and encompasses, for example, individual psychological motivations a teller may have for relating his or her experiences in the form of a particular story.

One important task in my case studies will be to examine how the special self-reflexive potential of heterodiegetic narration contributes to larger conversations on the significance and the cultural status of reading in novels. The next chapter will lay the foundation for these analyses by discussing why prevalent narratological models of communication have a blind spot when it comes to the self-reflexive dimension of heterodiegetic narration, and by suggesting a way to fill in this blind spot.

---

28 Monika Fludernik has further refined Nünning's suggestions by pointing out that self-reflexivity in metanarration can refer to different aspects such as the act of communication and its participants ("metanarrational") and the form in which the elements appear in the actual text ("metadiscursive") (see Fludernik 2003b: 23). Her concept of "metadiscursivity" names one aspect of the reflection on medial experience that I am interested in, but is still focussed on the form and content of the text rather than the medium or the practices.

In sum, the narratological inquiries into metafictional and metanarrative elements provide a basis for a more fine-tuned understanding of different kinds of self-reflexivity. They emphasize that self-reflexivity in a novel can have rather different scopes of reference (see Fludernik 2003b: 15). Different aspects of what constitutes a novel, such as its fictional character, its status as an artefact, or its status as a narrative, can be explored. Both Nünning (2001b) and Fludernik (2003a) close their surveys by calling for further research on the functions of metanarration in concrete literary-historical contexts ("Funktionsgeschichte"). It is one of the aims of this study to contribute to this larger project, but also to recalibrate its perspective. I am, after all, not interested in the phenomena 'metanarration' or 'metafiction' per se, but in the function of such self-reflexive elements in probing the status, purposes, and effects of narrative fiction, or, to put it more provocatively, the novel's justification of its own existence.

In the case studies, I will use the model I have developed for distinguishing different aspects of reading in order to analyse novelistic self-reflexivity in the broader sense outlined above. I will examine how the novels explore and assert not only their status as narratives and acts of communication, but also as material entities, subjects of communication between individuals, and points of reference within the larger system of literature. To understand how both story and discourse contribute to this exploration, however, it is first necessary to consider the different levels on which novels evoke the process of reading.

Chapter 2
The Reader in the Text: Dramatizing Literary Communication

One way of thinking about reader figures, reading scenes, and debates about reading in the novel as self-reflexive is to see them as special instances of *mise en abyme*: through them, a novel mirrors its own status as an artefact created for reading.[1] Another way of foregrounding reading as a theme is by highlighting the relational character of the text itself as a piece of communication: besides providing descriptions of readers on the level of the story, novels also have different ways of presenting themselves as being addressed to a more or less specific circle of recipients. The introductory passage from the English translation of Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, which contains many instances of such emphases, gives an impression of the range of more or less obvious narrative techniques that can be involved:

> In a village in La Mancha (I don't want to bother you with its name) there lived, not very long ago, one of those gentlemen who keep a lance in the lance-rack, a skinny old horse, and a fast grey-hound. [...] It's said his family name was Quijada, or maybe Quesada: there's some disagreement among the writers who've discussed the matter. Not that this makes much difference in our story; it's just important to tell things as faithfully as you can.
> And you've also got to understand that the aforementioned gentleman spent his free time (which meant almost all the time) reading tales of chivalry, with such passion and pleasure that he almost forgot to keep up his hunting, not to mention taking care of his estate, carrying his curiosity and foolishness so far that he sold acre after acre of good crop land to buy books of these tales. He brought home as many as he could find, and read them, but none seemed to him as good as those written by the famous Feliciano de Silva, which he relished for the clarity of their prose and their complicated arguments, to his mind positively pearl-like, especially when he read gallant love declarations and letters full of courtly challenges, like: *The ability to reason the un-reason which has afflicted my reason saps my ability to reason, so that I complain with good reason of your infinite loveliness.* (DQ 13)[2]

---

1 See Stewart (1996: 17); similar points are made by Pearson (1999: 10) and Dahms (2005: 27).

2 English translation by Burton Raffel. The Spanish original reads: "En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme, no ha mucho tiempo que vivía un hidalgo de los de lanza en astillero, adarga antigua, rocín flaco y galgo corredor. [...] Quieren decir que tenía el sobrenombre de Quijada, o Quesada, que en esto hay alguna diferencia en los autores que deste caso escriben; aunque, por conjeturas verosímiles, se deja entender que se llamaba Quejana. Pero esto importa poco a nuestro cuento; basta que en la narración dél no se salga un punto de la verdad.
Es, pues, de saber que este sobredicho hidalgo, los ratos que estaba ocioso, que eran los más del año, se daba a leer libros de caballerías, con tanta afición y gusto, que olvidó casi de todo punto el ejercicio de la caza, y aun la administración de su hacienda. Y llegó a tanto su curiosidad y

On the level of the story, all the main ingredients for the quixotic plot are already present in these introductory paragraphs: the protagonist's obsession with books is not only his main foible but also a source of potential conflict, as is suggested by the mention of the activities it obstructs. Besides such references to reading as a fictional character's pastime, however, the passage also foregrounds the notion of reading in other ways. First and foremost, it features the pronoun 'you', which is already used in the very first sentence. 'You' clearly does not refer to a character in the story, but to someone outside of it – but to whom exactly? To me, the actual reader of the book, who is scanning those lines? Or to a character in the story? Or some other entity? Or does it maybe not 'refer' to anybody at all, but rather evoke a process? In the following section, I will discuss narratological models for conceptualizing this kind of direct address, and explain why regarding it in terms of processes rather than figures is fruitful for an analysis concerned with the complexity of reading.

While the use of the pronoun 'you' is the most obvious way in which the passage draws attention to the process of reception, a closer look reveals further elements that allude to it more implicitly. For example, the phrase "one of those gentlemen who" suggests that Don Quijote is a particular type of man, and that a recipient's familiarity with this type is presupposed. Another instance can be found in the sentence "It's said his family name was Quijada, or maybe Quesada: there's some disagreement among the writers who've discussed the matter". This round-about way of supplying information about the protagonist could be seen as evoking a critical reading stance, which entails the opportunity of checking the reliability of information. It conveys the sense of a speaker who wants to antici-pate or forestall a reaction on the part of the person reading the text. Such elements, in short, foreground the text's character as an enunciation that is geared towards reception, even in those passages that do not feature explicit second-person pronouns. The example shows that evocations of the process of reception (or reader address in a broad sense) do not necessarily have to involve any second-person pronouns at all.

As the opening of *Don Quijote* illustrates, moreover, the evocation of recep-tion is closely connected with the evocation of the production of communication:

---

desatino en esto, que vendió muchas hanegas de tierra de sembradura para comprar libros de caballerías en que leer, y así, llevó a su casa todos cuantos pudo haber dellos; y de todos, ningunos le parecían tan bien como los que compuso el famoso Feliciano de Silva, porque la claridad de su prosa y aquellas entricadas razones suyas le parecían de perlas, y más cuando llegaba a leer aquellos requiebros y cartas de desafíos, donde en muchas partes hallaba escrito: La razón de la sinrazón que a mi razón se hace, de tal manera mi razón enflaquece, que con razón me quejo de la vuestra fermosura."

notably, the passage also features an 'I' as a counterpart to the 'you'. This 'I' assumes responsibility for aspects of the text's production – in the first sentence, for example, for the selection of those details that are conveyed to the recipient. An utterance such as "it's just important to tell things as faithfully as you can", in turn, highlights the relationship between production and reception: it reflects on the principles guiding the composition of the text, which allow some speculations as to its implicit purposes and effects.[3]

In the last few decades, narratologists have developed elaborate suggestions on how to analyse the relations between the representation of communication in the text and the status of the text itself as an act of communication. A major enterprise in narrative theory has been to answer the question of how pronouns like 'I' and 'you' work in narrative texts, and to raise awareness that a simple identification of the 'I' in narrative discourse with the real-life author, or the 'you' with myself as the actual reader, fails to take into account the special communicative conditions of the fictional text. At the same time, this focus on how fictional narrative texts *mimic* more or less specific communication scenarios has at times tended to obscure the question of how they *enact* communication – a point that is particularly important for my inquiry. In the following two sections, I will introduce those theorists who have shaped my thinking about the evocation of reception in novels, and I will introduce my own key concepts for a performative rhetoric of reading: the projection of reading stances and the performance of authorship.

---

3 The narrative situation of *Don Quijote* as a whole is even more interesting than the analysis of this passage can convey, not least because of the more explicitly self-reflexive elements featured in later chapters. There is the famous elaborate editor fiction featured in the novel – at the end of chapter 8, a "second author" (DQ 49) suddenly reveals himself, who professes to be a reader himself, relating the incidents he has in turn gleaned from a manuscript originally written in Arabic by the "historian" Sidi Hamid Benengeli (DQ 51–52). Matters become even more complicated in volume two of the novel (published in 1615), in which the manuscript of volume one is mentioned as an object on the level of the story, and Don Quijote meets people who have read about him. In a study dedicated to an analysis of the narrative situation in Cervantes's novel, or a full interpretation of this work, these special features would certainly have to be objects of sustained analysis. The aim of the present section, however, is merely to take *Don Quijote* as a prototypical example for narrative techniques that are also featured in subsequent quixotic novels (for a sophisticated interpretation of the significance of editor fiction see McKeon 2002: 273–278). In what is to my knowledge the most extensive English-language analysis of the discourse level in *Don Quijote*, James Parr (1988) argues that the special characteristics of voice as well as the handling of paratextual elements such as the preface serve the function of "questioning the very premises of narrative authority" (39), an assessment that accords with my theory about authorial narration in quixotic works.

The Projection of Reading Stances

The incorporation of 'the reader' into narrative texts has been conceptualized by differentiating reader figures on the levels of the story and the discourse. In his article "Reader Figures in Narrative" (2004 [1983]), Paul Goetsch proposes a taxonomy on the basis of concepts developed by Wayne Booth, Wolfgang Iser, and Gerald Prince. Goetsch situates 'the reader' on four different levels of communication: the real-life or actual reader (complement to the real-life author), the implied reader (*impliziter Leser*, complement to the implied author),[4] the fictive reader (*fiktiver Leser*, complement to the narrator) and the fictional reader or reading character (*Lesergestalt*).[5] Focussing on the latter two types of readers, Goetsch emphasizes the long tradition and large variety of representations of reading in narrative texts. Under the concept of the "fictive reader" (ibid.: 190–194), he subsumes examples such as the famous "Reader, I married him" in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (2001 [1847]: 517) as well as more specific invocations, such as those in Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*: "'Bless my heart,' cries my young, volatile reader, 'I shall never have patience to get through these volumes [...]'" (2011 [1794]: 74) or in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1974 [1749]: 32): "Nor do I fear that my sensible Reader, though most luxurious in his Taste, will start, cavil, or be offended". In this terminology, the Cervantes passage quoted above features both a reading character, namely Quijote, and a fictive reader: the 'you', which is thus described as a recipient figure created by the text (though not an acting character on the level of the plot).

---

4 In narratological works, references to the 'implied reader' are usually modelled after Wayne Booth, who coined the term as the complement to the implied author. This is the sense in which the concept is used by Goetsch, or in Monika Fludernik's *Introduction to Narratology* (2009: 160): "The implied reader, correlating with the implied author, is the ideal addressee invoked by a particular text: in the case of George Eliot or Goethe, for example, an educated person with a highly developed sense of moral values". Wolfgang Iser (1978) changes the implications of the concept. As I am going to discuss in more detail later on in the section, his *impliziter Leser* functions as the centrepiece of a whole theory of interpretation.

5 See Goetsch (2004: 189). The article is a translated version; the terms from the German original (1983) are given in italics. Goetsch even adds a further subdivision of the extratextual level of communication into (1) the afore-mentioned real-life author/real-life reader, and (2) a level on which "the author as the creator of a work of prose fiction and the reader as a prospective consumer of the narrative text can be differentiated" (2004: 189). It seems to me, however, that the second aspect can be conflated with the "implied reader/author" level, since both posit figurations of author and reader as constructs created through the work (see also e.g. Schmid [2013: 171]).

Goetsch restricts his use of the 'fictive reader' concept to such cases in which a 'you' or a 'reader' is explicitly addressed in the text because he is mainly interested in functions of explicit references to reader figures in texts. Theorists who are more committed to developing a general communication model for narrative fiction go a step further. Wolf Schmid, who has put forward a particularly sophisticated and fine-grained proposal for the theoretical embedding of reader figures into the wider framework of narrative theory, insists that every narrative text creates a fictive reader.[6] This fictive reader is the addressee of the narrator (also fictive), who tells the story. He (or she) is created not just by explicit reference or address, but also implicitly, by any feature of the narration that evokes an image of a counterpart to whom it is addressed (cf. Schmid 2013: 178).

In Schmid's model, every narrative text creates not only a fictive reader but also an abstract reader (similar to the concept of the 'implied reader', as used by Goetsch, or 'ideal reader'). Schmid understands the abstract reader as the sum of an author's notions about the reader of a work at the time of its composition (2013: 171). These notions are only accessible in the text itself, which ultimately means that the 'abstract reader' for Schmid is a construct the actual reader ascribes to the author as evoked by the work as a whole (an evocation that Schmid labels the 'abstract author', see ibid.: 171–172). Such a model suggests that a passage like the one from Cervantes quoted above involves two clear-cut figurations of a recipient. It distinguishes, for one thing, the 'you' addressed by the narrator, which may not even be a reader, but rather a listener to a story about Don Quijote, addressed in a familiar manner and supposed to have potential access to documentary information about the characters and places involved. This is the fictive reader.[7] Secondly, the model posits an abstract reader, the ideal recipient of *Don Quijote*, who is a reader rather than a listener and knows that the story is a fiction rather than a real-life account. Neither is to be equated with the actual reader. Many characteristics cannot clearly be assigned to either the fictive or the abstract reader and then have to be seen as shared by both, for example, the ability to judge the quotation from de Silva's text as convoluted and pretentious, and thus to see the comic potential in Don Quijote's own appreciation of it as "positively pearl-like".

---

6 In this respect, Schmid agrees with Gerald Prince, who proposes a similar concept under the label "narratee" (1980a).

7 As the fictive reader is often characterized as a listener or as a recipient in a non-specified type of medial interaction, Schmid (2013: 175–180) has recently proposed to rename it "fictive addressee" (*fiktiver Adressat*).

While I think this is a theoretically sound way of analysing the text from a narratological perspective, there is an aspect of the 'reader figures' model that does not match the design of my own study. In conceptualizing fictive and abstract readers as entities with specific characteristics, the model translates the dynamic process of reading into a more static phenomenon, that is, into characteristics that can be assigned to distinct figures. In my own readings, I want to develop an alternative perspective: rather than trying to reconstruct different instances of 'the reader' on different levels of the communication model, I will regard the texts as 'projecting' reading *stances*. This allows for a more flexible treatment of evocations of reading in a text: they do not have to be added up or combined into one coherent image of a reader. Instead, I can see them as foregrounding different aspects of reading as a complex activity. The passage from *Don Quijote*, for example, in combining the direct address via the pronoun 'you' with colloquialisms, projects reading in social terms, as an intimate conversation and as establishing companionship. It also projects cognitive aspects of reading: the comments on the selection of aspects that are included in the story evoke the processing of information, while the juxtaposition of different kinds of writing circumscribes reading as an activity involving evaluation.

I use the verb 'to project' in the sense of "conveying to others", then, to describe how texts lay out and characterize ways of reading. However, a second meaning of the word 'project' is also central to my understanding of the concept: to "transfer or transmit".[8] By projecting reading stances, novels transfer different notions of what the act of reading should entail. They issue an invitation or appeal to the actual recipient of the text to take up this stance in their own reading. I do not mean to suggest that the text thereby determines the actual reader's response. Instead, it delineates particular approaches to reading (e.g. as processing information, evaluating, reacting to a partner in conversation...) and offers the actual reader the opportunity to position him- or herself within the spectrum that has thus been opened up. For example, by projecting reading as a participation in an intimate conversation, the passage from *Don Quijote* quoted above could prompt me as the actual reader to see myself involved in such a communication – or conversely, to consider the difference between the kind of receptive activity I am involved in when reading a classic by a long-dead author and the intimate conversation that is evoked here. Similarly, a projection of an evaluative stance may prompt me to agree with the evaluation put forward in the text, but I could also ultimately come to a different assessment. Either way, in this case the text circumscribes a notion of reading as an act of appraisal.

---

8 See the third edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, entries 11a and 11d for "to project".

The projection of reading stances is an important part of a novel's self-reflexivity: by foregrounding specific aspects of reading, novels fashion themselves as particular kinds of artefacts, geared towards certain kinds of reception and consumption. I do not regard this kind of circumscription of reading practices as determined by necessarily conscious choices on the part of the actual author, but, as Schmid does for the abstract reader, as "the result [...] of the acts of creation objectivized in the work" (2010: 55). The self-reflexive aspect is especially obvious in the case of novels that feature extradiegetic heterodiegetic narration with some overt narratorial commentary, so that the 'I' and 'you' that are evoked are more or less closely associated with the roles of author and novel reader.[9] As I have already suggested in the previous chapter and will argue in more detail in the next section, such works can be read as dramatizing the relation between the production and the reception or consumption of the novel as a literary artefact in their own discourse.

Gérard Genette has called the paratext – accompanying features like titles, prefaces, or footnotes that are part of a text's presentation – "zones of transaction" which mediate between the text and the "empirical (sociohistorical) reality of the text's public" (Genette 1997: 1; 408). To the extent to which they refer to or evoke particular, historically situated practices of reading, the elements that project acts of reading fulfil a similar function: they can be seen as shaped by the premises and debates about reading that are prevalent at the time of the text's production, but they also invite actual readers to apply (and possibly to reflect on) reading practices of their own present.

In contrast to the concept of the 'implied reader' (*impliziter Leser*) as developed by one of the most famous proponents of reception theory, Wolfgang Iser, my concept of projecting reading stances is not envisaged as a centrepiece of a theory of interpretation, but as an instrument enabling a fine-grained analysis of novelistic self-reflection. In *The Act of Reading*, Iser plays down the very aspect I am most interested in: the *differences* between notions of reading that are expressed in the projections, and their rootedness in historically situated, changing discourses about reading. For Iser, the central point is the universality of the implied reader, who "embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect – predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself" (1978: 34). The notion of the implied reader is "a

---

9 This association is closer in the case of the quotes from Rowson's and Fielding's novels than the example from *Don Quijote*, as they explicitly evoke reading (and, as the larger contexts of the quotes show, even specifically novel reading) rather than an unspecified act of reception.

transcendental model which makes it possible for the structured effects [*allgemeine Wirkungsstrukturen*] of literary texts to be described" (1978: 66). Thus, when Iser writes about a "reader role" that becomes describable with the help of his concept, he is not interested in characterizing or differentiating between *kinds* of roles the text might project, but postulates the position as an abstract functional entity. The goal of his work lies not in historical differentiation but in developing a universal language to describe the way in which textual structures prefigure reading as a mental process.

Iser's universalizing claim becomes especially obvious in his discussion of another conceptualization of the reader, namely Erwin Wolff's notion of the "intended reader", put forward in an article published in *Poetica* in 1971. Wolff proposes to reconstruct the images or ideas of readers that are formed in the author's mind. The intended reader can take many forms. As Iser sums it up, this figuration

> may reveal itself through anticipation of the norms and values of contemporary readers, through individualization of the public, through apostrophes to the reader, through the assigning of attitudes, or didactic intentions, or the demand for the willing suspension of disbelief. Thus the intended reader, as a sort of fictional inhabitant of the text, can embody not only the concepts and conventions of the contemporary public but also the desire of the author both to link up with these concepts and work on them – sometimes just portraying them, sometimes acting upon them. (Iser 1978: 33)

Iser concedes that the exploration of such reader fictions is a worthwhile task, but he emphasizes the more universal ambitions of his own study: to focus on the plane of reception instead of that of production. As a number of critics – most recently, Renate Brosch – have pointed out, 'reception' in Iser's sense refers to "hermeneutical acts of interpretation" (Brosch 2013b: 8). It is in this sense decontextualized – an understanding of novel reading as a changing cultural and social practice is not within the compass of Iser's theory. Umberto Eco's influential theory of semiotics in *The Role of the Reader* (originally *Lector in Fabula*, 1979) is similarly focused on hermeneutics. For my own project, however, Wolff's notion that the construction of the text both reflects and anticipates specific, historically grounded ways of reading is highly relevant.

In the last part of this section, I want to relate my approach to the work of three scholars of narrative who, in their different ways, follow in Wolff's footsteps in taking a contextualizing approach to theorizing the relation between the actual reader and textual evocations of reading: Robyn Warhol, Peter Rabinowitz, and Garrett Stewart. Their work has, in different ways, anticipated Brosch's (2013b: 8) call for an analysis of reception that fuses approaches from literary and cultural studies and has shaped my thinking about the narrative theory of reading.

Robyn Warhol examines the ambivalent status of reader address and argues that Victorian authors made use of this ambivalence to highlight their diverging notions of the purpose of their fictions. She distinguishes between two modes. The first, "engaging" reader address, is designed to encourage the actual reader to identify and sympathize with assessments sketched in the text itself. It reinforces the impression that the text was written with the earnest, straight-forward desire to convey a moral or political message. The second, "distancing" reader address, "necessarily places a distance between the actual reader and the inscribed 'you' in the text" (1989: 29) – be it through the use of irony or very specific descriptions that are unlikely to match the situation of actual readers. Novels with distancing modes of address, Warhol argues, are more playful than their engaging counterparts, "reminding the reader that the text is, after all, only a fiction" (ibid.: 41). Warhol's understanding of reader address informs my view that reader address, especially in cases of heterodiegetic narration, should be regarded as also pertaining to the actual reader, and that one of its crucial functions is to transport notions about a novel's purposes and (envisaged) effects.

Besides Warhol's feminist approach to narrative theory, there is another major narratological approach that is compatible with a historically sensitive interest in projected reading stances: the rhetorically oriented approach to narrative theory that is associated with the Chicago school and scholars such as the afore-mentioned Wayne Booth, Peter Rabinowitz, and James Phelan. By understanding a novel first and foremost as an artefact whose constituent parts are designed (more or less consciously) to put forward certain ideas, norms, and values, this approach combines a central interest in the linguistic patterns of the text with a consciousness of the embeddedness of such features in specific historical contexts.

In the field of rhetorical narratology, the most important influence on my concept of the 'projection of reading stances' is Peter J. Rabinowitz's 'authorial audience', a category developed in order to elucidate "the ways in which Western readers' prior knowledge of conventions shapes their experiences and evaluations of the narratives they confront" (1987: 3).[10] More specifically, Rabinowitz suggests that authors "design their books rhetorically for some more or less

---

10 Rabinowitz, in turn, emphasizes his indebtedness to Jonathan Culler's concept of the 'ideal reader', which emphasizes the importance of prior knowledge on the part of the reader: "The question is not what actual readers happen to do, but what an ideal reader must know implicitly to read and interpret works in ways which we consider acceptable, in accordance with the institution of literature" (Culler 1975: 123–124). Rabinowitz's distinction between the 'authorial' and the 'narrative' audience is similar to Wolf Schmid's distinction between the abstract reader as the abstract author's addressee and the fictive reader as the narrator's addressee.

specific *hypothetical audience*, which I call the *authorial audience*" (1987: 21, emphases original). This involves making assumptions about "the readers' beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with conventions" (ibid.). The 'actual' flesh-and-blood reader, with his or her own set of knowledge, beliefs and values, can never become part of the authorial audience (see ibid.: 34), but he or she can try to get close, to follow an invitation "to read in a particular socially constituted way that is shared by the author and his or her expected readers" (ibid.: 22). In order to arrive at an adequate reading, the recipient must both be familiar with the social context in which the work was written, and pick up on directions provided in the text itself.[11] In making references to a value system shared by author and audience central to the concept, Rabinowitz defines the 'authorial audience' as historically grounded.

In my study, I will further explore Rabinowitz's idea that through the text, an *invitation* to read in a certain way is extended to actual readers, who can (but do not have to) assume these stances. In contrast to Rabinowitz, my main interest in identifying such reading stances does not lie in spelling out the literary conventions that constitute the rules for this kind of reading (see 1987: 27) but in tracing the different aspects of reading as a complex practice that are foregrounded. In short, I will concentrate on the images of reading that emerge through the text's rhetoric. Looking for 'projections of reading' thus involves construction and interpretation: elements of the text are examined with regard to the question 'if I see this as a rhetorical element, what does it tell me about the kind of reading stance it describes or evokes?'.

A third important influence on my concept of projected reading stances is Garrett Stewart. In his theory of reader address in the Victorian novel, Stewart notes that the representation of reading characters functions as a *mise en abyme* reflecting on the relation between the author and the actual reader. Even more importantly, he makes use of Althusser's concept of interpellation to describe how a text "conscripts" its audience.[12] The text, Stewart argues, writes its own

---

11 For Rabinowitz, reading as the 'authorial audience' is neither necessarily the best way of reading a work, nor does it have to equal a full interpretation of the text. He notes, however, that for one thing, there seems to be a strong cultural imperative for reading this way – aiming to find out the author's intention – and that the concept thus describes a wide-spread ideal for reading (see 1987: 30). Moreover, the notion of 'authorial reading', in asking about the way in which a text refers to a shared value system, also makes it possible to establish a reference point for so-called 'resisting' readings that attempt to point to ideological problems or blind spots (see 1987: 31).

12 "[A]s member of an audience, your private reading – along with that of every other reader – is actually convoked and restaged, put in service to the text. Either as an identifying notation or as a narrative event, this reading of your reading – or of you reading – is what I mean by the notion of

reader by addressing him or her in a certain way. His description of a text's enactment of a communication scenario in terms of interpellation has influenced my approach insofar as it again emphasizes the aspect of invitation or evocation rather than the question of reference (i.e. the attempt to pinpoint a referent or reader figure for the explicit or implicit 'you'). I am intrigued by Stewart's notion of "conscription", and in a sense this is what I describe in my case studies: how the novels 'write' their own audiences by evoking different ways of reading. At the same time, I am less interested than Stewart in "the manipulated fact [...] of audience reaction" (1996: 394): my study is not about the recipients' reaction or the state of the subject-as-reader in the process of reading but about the ways in which texts respond to historically situated premises and hopes about reading through their own rhetoric. In other words, I do not want to argue that (or how) the interpellation actually works on actual readers. Stewart's dense and metaphorical way of discussing the linguistic shifts of texts has been an inspiration to me, but I also find that he tends to mystify the act of reading ("the ritual of textual consumption as an ideological rite [...] at once, of estranging passage and of cultural repatriation" [1996: 394]). Rather than presupposing such functions of the act of novel-reading, I am more interested in how the texts themselves construct and negotiate them.

A question that remains is which parts of the texts are most clearly involved in projecting reading stances. Reading scenes and explicit reader address are Stewart's starting points, and these features will also be considered in my study. In theory, at least, *any* feature of a novel can be examined with regard to its implications about the kind of reading it evokes. However, the most promising places to look for textual elements that project reading are arguably those passages in novels where the discourse level is most foregrounded: the narratorial commentary, i.e. "those speech acts by a narrator that go beyond providing the facts of the fictional world and the recounting of events" (Nünning 2005: 74). Sometimes, these passages feature explicit reader address. But even if they do not, they are prime locations for what I call the 'performance of authorship'. The development of this concept – which I posit as a complement to the projection of reading stances – deserves a section of its own.

---

a conscripted response. Implicated by apostrophe or by proxy, by address or by dramatized scenes of reading, you are deliberately drafted by the text, or written *with*" (Stewart 1996: 8).

Narratorial Commentary and the Performance of Authorship

It has already been proposed that the type of heterodiegetic narration that Franz K. Stanzel termed 'authorial' – featuring a "highly audible and visible narrator, who sees the story from the ontological position of an outsider" (Jahn 2005: 364) – lends itself especially well to circumscribing practices of reading.[13] This is at least in part due to the fact that authorial narration can be employed to create the impression that the author, as the instance responsible for the production of the work, is reflecting on elements of the story, on the construction of the text, and on the purpose of the novel as a genre.[14] Such a statement may seem to elide one of the most cherished distinctions of classical narratology, namely that between author and narrator. The tenet that the voice of the 'authorial narrator' must not be confused with the author's voice has long been an accepted article of belief in narratology, and eminent figures like Franz K. Stanzel have presented it as an instance of progress in narrative theory:

> The differentiation of the figure of the authorial narrator from the author is still a relatively recent accomplishment in narrative theory – it began to become accepted around the end of the 1950s: the authorial narrator, as we meet him in *Tom Jones* or *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*), for instance, is, within certain limits, an independent character who has been created by the author (just as the other characters of the novel have been) and with whose own peculiar personality the reader and critic are confronted. (Stanzel 1984: 13)

At the same time, Stanzel's own choice of the term 'authorial narration' can be read as an indication that he somewhat overstates his case when he insists that a novel like *Tom Jones* should be seen as being narrated by an instance comparable to an "independent character". The 'I' of authorial narration, after all, is a very

---

13 I am aware of the fact that Stanzel's and Genette's terminologies for describing narrative mediation do not complement each other in any simple way. I use Stanzel's 'authorial narration' when referring to third-person narration with prominent commentary and also his concepts of 'first-person narration' and 'figural narration' as a shorthand to describe texts that feature the kind of narrative situation Stanzel would describe as typical. I use Genette's terminology for more detailed analyses of specific aspects of point of view. For example, I use Genette's 'homo-/ heterodiegetic' when referring to the difference between a narrator who is part of the story and one who is not.

14 In the case of homodiegetic or, in Stanzel's terms, first-person narration, the self-reflection on the act of narration often has a more psychological spin, for example reflecting on the stories people tell about their lives in order to make sense of them (as, for example, in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and *When We Were Orphans*).

different case from the 'I' employed by a first-person narrator. The views and opinions that can be attributed to this instance take precedence over those expressed by a character within a story – a precedence that is hard to grasp without some kind of reference to the author.

In narrative theory itself, there have been opposing positions with regard to this point. On the one hand, there is the already-described strong tendency to regard the persona of the 'authorial narrator' as a theoretical instrument that allows scholars to keep the author (and thus her evaluations, responsibility, intentions and so forth) separate from the interpretation of the text. On the other hand, there is a movement, especially within rhetorical and feminist narrative theory, to reconsider in what ways the voice in authorial narration should be understood as making reference to the author. For the type of text I am interested in, the latter view is highly productive, especially with regard to a further concept that is frequently explicitly or implicitly introduced into the discussion: the concept of authority. The feminist narratologist Susan Lanser has done pioneering work in this area by exploring the connections between authorship and authority as they manifest in what she calls the 'authorial voice'. I will follow Lanser's cue in examining such connections but suggest that they need to be discussed in an even more differentiated way which pays attention to the fact that there are different kinds of authority claims. *Pace* Lanser I argue that conspicuous instances of authorial narration in particular often serve to explore and defend rather than simply assert types of authority that have been associated with the novel as a genre.

In classical definitions of the 'authorial narrator', references to the author are conspicuously absent, while the notion of authority is highlighted. The *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, for example, states that the authorial narrator "sees the story from [...] a position of absolute authority which allows her/him to know everything about events and characters, including their thoughts and unconscious motives" (Jahn 2005: 364). Other scholars have for this reason objected to using the adjective 'authorial' at all – Genette, in a discussion of Stanzel's model and Dorrit Cohn's modifications, suggests replacing the term "authorial third-person" with "narratorial third-person" (1988: 118).

By contrast, Lanser stresses the connection between authors and what she terms the "authorial voice", i.e. a type of narration that includes "extrarepresentational acts", that is, utterances which do more than "simply predicate the words and actions of fictional characters": "reflections, judgements, generalizations about the world 'beyond' the fiction, direct addresses to the narratee, comments on the narrative process, allusions to other writers and texts" (Lanser 1992: 16–17). She proposes to retain the term "authorial",

not to imply an ontological equivalence between author and narrator but to suggest that such a voice (re)produces the structural and functional situation of authorship. In other words, where a distinction between the (implied) author and a public, heterodiegetic narrator is not textually marked, readers are invited to equate the narrator with the author and the narratee with themselves. This conventional equation gives authorial voice a privileged status among narrative forms [...]. (Lanser 1992: 16)

The key phrases here are "(re)produces the structural and functional situation of authorship" and "conventional equation". I would argue that the ostensible problem of "ontology" becomes less relevant as soon as one does not conceive of the contents of narratorial commentary as personal statements of opinion or preference that make it necessary to identify an 'I' that is characterized by them, but as parts of a performance of authorship. This argument follows a recent trend in studies of authorship to see "acts of authorship as, at least in part, culturally constructed as performances that are enabled and constrained by social norms and different media configurations", as Ingo Berensmeyer, Gert Buelens and Marysa Demoor put it in their programmatic introduction to a volume entitled *Authorship as Cultural Performance* (2012b: 10).[15]

As in the case of the projections of reading, then, I propose to focus on the processual character of the communication enacted by the text, rather than constructing more or less abstract 'instances' to whom communication can be ascribed. Being interested in authorial narration as a performance of authorship means seeing it as a process which foregrounds the logic of a text's production instead of focussing on the figure of the narrator as a personalized entity with distinct abilities, values and opinions. Seen from this perspective, the point of authorial narration is not what kind of persona it creates (or whether such a persona is created at all)[16] but how it enacts a rhetorical stance which the actual author of the work, by way of this work's creation, assumes towards its readership.

---

15 An earlier study that also addresses representations of authoriality and authority in different kinds of literary texts is Städtke/Kray (2003).

16 The idea that all fictional narratives should be regarded as featuring a narrator, covert or overt, is another article of faith that is currently hotly debated (see the volume *Author and Narrator*, edited by Birke/Köppe 2015). A very strong stance against speaking of a personalized authorial narrator has been taken by Richard Walsh (2007: 84), who questions the practicability of the author-narrator distinction in general: "fictions are narrated by their authors, or by characters. [...] Extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrators (that is, 'impersonal' and 'authorial' narrators), who cannot be represented without thereby being rendered homodiegetic or intradiegetic, are in no way distinguishable from authors."

Such a view also sheds new light on the connection between authorial narration and authority. The "position of absolute authority" which Jahn ascribes to the authorial narrator suggests that 'he' should be seen as a superhuman figure who can read minds and look into the future. Fludernik's definition of this type of narrator puts forward a similar view. She envisages a

> prominent narrator persona who tells us quite explicitly what is what [...], evaluating the dramatis personae with no uncertain strokes of the pen, and maintaining an ongoing bantering exchange with the reader in the form of exhortation. [...] He functions like the Lord of Creation surveying his world, knows the past, present and future of his characters, can move between different locations at different ends of the fictional world, and has unlimited access to characters' minds. (Fludernik 2009: 124)

Even more explicitly, Jan Alber argues that "the authorial narrator's mind-reading abilities are not only improbable but also impossible; they involve superhuman or telepathic qualities and hence the unnatural" (Alber 2013: 143).

The close connection between authorial narrator and author suggested by Lanser and further developed in the idea of a performance of authorship, by contrast, links authority to the human powers connected with the act of story-telling, with acts of invention, selection and persuasion. This kind of power is more limited and more tenuous than that of a superhuman figure would be. Authorial narration, from this perspective, is not first and foremost an act of asserting a superior stance or exercising control over the reader, but a bid or claim which typically involves different kinds of authority that can be in conflict with each other. At this point, I thus part ways with Lanser, who sees prototypical authorial narration as an expression of patriarchal hegemony. Authorial narration has traditionally been a problem for female writers, she argues, because all authors are not equal: for female writers of fiction, putting forward authority claims has been more conflict-laden than for male authors. On the one hand, authorial narration "has allowed women access to 'male' authority by separating the narrating 'I' from the female body". On the other hand, "when an authorial voice has represented itself as female, it has risked being disqualified" (Lanser 1992: 18). Female authors such as Jane Austen or George Eliot, as Lanser sees it, have thus had to develop their own "authorial voice(s) within and against the narrative and social convention of [their] time and place" (ibid.). Vera Nünning (2012) has more recently offered an update on Lanser's argument, concluding that those female authors in the eighteenth century who privilege female experience do so by less obtrusive techniques than their male counterparts.

While these studies offer very interesting insights into the different functions of the authorial voice, the interest in specifically female narrative strategies also creates problems: both Lanser and Nünning show a tendency to depict the

authorial voice when employed by male authors as a monolithic foil. They also suggest that the impression of stable authority increases with the number of extrarepresentational acts (or, as one might also put it, with the degree of an authorial narrator's overtness). By contrast, I argue that authorial voice *in general* often tends to be, as Lanser has put it for the case of female authors, "a site of crisis, contradiction, or challenge" (1992: 17). The authority that is claimed in and through authorial narration is far from an unproblematic expression of control over a text's meaning and the functions it is supposed to fulfil. Rather than understanding authorial narration as primarily *expressing* a stable sense of authority, I see it as an act of rhetorical positioning.

What Lanser calls 'discursive authority', then, is an even more contested business than she envisages because it involves different kinds of authority (defined by the *OED* as "the power to influence action, opinion, belief"), which do not necessarily reinforce each other. One type of authority (I will label it *narrative authority*) comes as part and parcel of creating a work of fiction: it is the power to influence the reader's beliefs with regard to what happens in the story, what characters do and think and so on. Narrative authority is an integral part of the institution of fiction – being accepted as an author of fiction, whether male or female, means being able to put forward such authority claims, which cannot be contested.

However, extrarepresentational acts extend beyond the facts of the fictional world: they involve, for example, claims with regard to the psychological credibility of the characters that are portrayed, or with regard to the moral implications of the story. Such claims to psychological and ethical authority transcend the specific cases to which they are attached. They are linked to larger ideas about the purpose and potential of fictional writing, for example the notion that novels can give particular insights into the human psyche, or that they can function as models for morally sound behaviour. Whether authors of fiction are regarded as authorities with regard to moral or psychological questions is obviously a contested and also historically variable issue. An author's gender or other known autobiographical facts can certainly have an impact on his or her credibility as an authority in these matters. In this respect, I am in full agreement with Lanser. However, the personalized credibility assigned to an individual author is not as important as more general notions about the expertise of novel writers, and the potential of fictional representations. Authority claims in authorial narration, then, are instantiations and extensions of contemporary debates about the functions of novel-writing. This entails projections of reading stances, evoking the idea of novel reading as, for example, an act of moral assessment or of psychological analysis.

Claims to kinds of authority other than narrative authority have a somewhat contradictory aspect insofar as the more explicitly they are put forward, the more

they expose themselves to potential scrutiny and criticism. In contrast to the fictional facts themselves, reflections offered in commentary are subject to discussion. In a sense, many of these utterances can be read as partial answers to the question 'why should I read this book?' or 'what kind of activity am I engaging in when reading this book?' By spelling out a particular position, the extrarepresentational act also opens up the possibility of contradiction. In this sense, narratorial comments problematize authorial control at the same time at which they invoke it.

In the remainder of this section, I will illustrate my claims about authorial narration by means of a sample interpretation of a passage from the novel that is usually cited as a prototypical case of this type of narrative situation: Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*. This will also give me the opportunity to introduce some further concepts and distinctions for the analysis of authorial narration – or, more specifically, Lanser's 'extrarepresentational acts', also known as 'commentary' –, which are used in the case studies.

Tom Jones (1749), though not a quixotic novel, is a good test case for a sample analysis because it is a work by an author who, in Lanser's terms, can be regarded as expressing the very kind of comfortable authority that female authors cannot fully inhabit. Fielding's novels are marked by an elaborate employment of commentary, complete with reader addresses and asides in the first person. The view of Fielding's narrative style as expressing mastery is by no means an invention of feminist criticism; it has been a dominant view in narratological accounts of his work. Wayne Booth, to name but one prominent voice, cites a passage from *Tom Jones* to elucidate the effect of authorial narration to manoeuvre the reader into "the moral attitudes Fielding desires" (1972: 429). However, a reading focussing on the performance of authorship locates ambivalences and clashes in authority claims that negotiate anxieties about authority – anxieties that are not grounded in the person of the author or in his relation to previous authors (as in Bloom's 'anxiety of influence') but in the as yet unstable status of the novel as a genre. Many critics have remarked on the programmatic character of Fielding's novels, which outline and situate the novel as a rising new genre.

How exactly authorial narration becomes a complex strategy for staking claims and anticipating attacks concerning the purpose of the text can be traced in the following passage from the novel's first chapter. It starts out as a commentary on one of the minor characters', Bridget Allworthy's, mutterings about her brother's wish to take an orphaned child into his house:

> [1] With Reflections of this nature she [Bridget Allworthy] usually, as hath been hinted, accompany'd every Act of Compliance with her Brother's Inclinations; and surely nothing could more contribute to heighten the Merit of this Compliance, than a Declaration that she knew at the same time the Folly and Unreasonableness of those Inclinations to which she

submitted. [2] Tacit Obedience implies no Force upon the Will, and consequently may be easily, and without any Pains, preserved; but when a Wife, a Child, a Relation, or a Friend, performs what we desire, with Grumbling, and Reluctance, with Expressions of Dislike and Dissatisfaction, the manifest Difficulty which they undergo, must greatly enhance the Obligation. [3] As this is one of those deep Observations which very few Readers can be supposed capable of making themselves, I have thought proper to lend them my Assistance; but this is a Favour rarely to be expected in the Course of my Work. Indeed I shall seldom or never so indulge him, unless in such Instances as this, where nothing but the Inspiration with which we Writers are gifted, can possibly enable any one to make the Discovery. (Fielding 1974 [1749]: 46–47)

The extrarepresentational acts in this excerpt include all three kinds of narratorial commentary that Ansgar Nünning has usefully distinguished in his discussion of the main functions of comments (1997). Part [1] furnishes explanations and evaluations regarding particular characters or events in the fiction, in this case Bridget Allworthy's behaviour towards her brother, and can thus be seen as an example of a diegetic commentary. Part [2], as the shift into the gnomic present signals, no longer focuses on a particular fictional character, but offers a more general statement or maxim: this can be called a gnomic commentary, derived from 'gnome' in the sense of a "pithy statement of a general truth" (*OED*). Finally, part [3] reflects on the act of narration as well as on the reader's reaction, which is a type of commentary that can be labelled 'metadiscursive'.[17] While the reference to the author and the design of his work is most visible – because explicitly referred to – in part [3], the commentary in the first two parts also contributes to the performance of authorship in important ways.

In part [1], the description of Bridget Allworthy's behaviour is complemented with a moral assessment. In conjunction with the many other passages in this novel which work in a similar way, the casual and conversational manner in which the narration slides from description into fairly elaborate moral analysis ("as hath been hinted"; "surely nothing could more contribute") suggests that this kind of evaluation should be regarded as a self-evident purpose of the representation of fictional lives. The implicit performance of authorship that is involved in rating the "Merit" of Bridget's actions, then, involves a claim to authority with regard to issues of morality. The concomitant projection of reading as being at the receiving end of this wisdom implies an asymmetrical relationship (the reader is instructed). Part [2], by adding a more general ob-

---

17 In the original German, Nünning (1997) calls these three types "analytisch" (336), "synthetisch" (338) and "vermittlungsbezogen" ("mit primärem Bezug zum Erzählvorgang und zur eigenen Kommunikationssituation auf der Ebene der erzählerischen Vermittlung" [339]). I retain his definitions but have opted for rather free translations of the labels themselves.

servation, reinforces this impression and represents the little episode as a parable for (im)moral human behaviour, thus even more strongly foregrounding the notion that moral-didactic guidance is a prime function of fictional writing. Part [3] then comments on this very point and explicitly points out the asymmetrical distribution of competence such a notion of exchange is built on ("one of those deep Observations which very few Readers can be supposed capable of making themselves").

In this tripartite structure, the claims to authority connected with the producer of narrative fiction gradually themselves come into the focus of the commentary. However, the explicit references to the roles of author and reader in part [3] – the most conspicuous extrarepresentational utterances in the passage – do not constitute a straightforward intensification of the authority claims put forward in [1] and [2]. Instead, they reflect on an issue that is posed by the transition from [1] to [2]. The diegetic commentary in [1] could by itself almost be read as limiting itself to narrative authority, that is, as putting forward 'truths' that only pertain to a fictional character's behaviour. That this evaluation does in fact imply claims that go beyond the fictional world is true, but only foregrounded in the gnomic statements in [2].

Interestingly, part [2] not only makes a much more explicit claim to moral authority than [1] but at the same time introduces ambiguity, that is, invites doubt as to whether the kind of authority that is claimed here really pertains to the introduction of moral models. The utterances in [2] raise the question of what exactly the "deep Observations" evoked in part [3] refer to. While at first sight part [2] merely appears to generalize the normative points introduced in part [1] to a general *exemplum*, it could also be seen as shifting the focus of the authority claim itself. The "must" in the last sentence, in particular, when closely examined, does not seem to formulate desired moral values as much as an insight into the psychology of human relations, in which behaviour is often calculated towards achieving a certain kind of effect. One of the many ironies that resound in the passage is that, depending on the people involved, this typical kind of behaviour probably misses its object: it seems very doubtful that the sense of "Obligation" felt by the party whose wishes are being followed is in fact much increased by the other party's grumblings (even in the case of a person as good-natured as Mr. Allworthy).

What seems a fairly clear-cut case on the level of moral evaluation, then (the grumbling, obviously, does not enhance the *moral value* of the grumbler's actions), is more complicated on the level of psychology: the passage elucidates a typical kind of manipulative behaviour, but a kind whose success seems highly doubtful (as it is not manipulative enough to anticipate the emotions on the other side). I am emphasizing this point because I think the passage suggests two

different conclusions about the primary function of fiction: is it to give moral guidance, or to illustrate the intricacies of human behaviour? Do the two functions mutually enforce or subvert each other? And does the performance of authorship actually make an effective claim for authority for these two realms, or at least for one of them? Part [2], in short, presents a complex web of possible lessons a reader may learn from the preceding representation of Bridget Allworthy – however, lessons that neither easily combine nor point towards the same kind of authority claim. It is important to note that it is not this complication itself that *creates* the problem, i.e. the fact that moral and psychological authority claims are not covered by narrative authority and thus need to be backed up in other ways. Rather, I see the complex and ambiguous interlacing of different authority claims as a rhetorical device that serves both to foreground the problem and, simultaneously, to deflect it by making it hard to pinpoint exactly what kind of authority claim is put forward here.

A similar argument can be made concerning the ironic stance which pervades the passage. An interpretation of Fielding's use of irony that is often put forward is that it serves to cement the consensus of a moral majority by implying a tacit understanding between author and (preferably male) reader.[18] The examination of the rhetorical stance taken in this passage might at first sight confirm this impression – however, as I want to show in the last part of my discussion, it can also be read as another strategy that simultaneously invites and deflects criticism of the authority claims being put forward. To see how, it is helpful to consider a view of irony that serves to explain the link between irony and authority in general and thus to elucidate both readings of irony in Fielding mentioned above as well as their interconnection: Linda Hutcheon's (1995) conceptualization of irony as an inherently social phenomenon. Hutcheon describes irony as both made possible by the existence of differing kinds of communities, and as itself producing communities. Irony, then, is as much about the negotiation of relationships as it is about establishing or obscuring a specific meaning in language. One of the social effects of irony, which Hutcheon (1995: 54) calls "aggregation", can be understood in terms of exclusion – as an elitist stance, and as designed to stage the ironist as "a kind of omniscient, omnipotent god-figure, smiling down [...] upon the rest of us". However, it may also function as an inclusionary force – as calling for "collaboration, even collusion" between ironist and addressee (ibid.). And it may, finally, combine these two – "as implying an assumption of

---

18 See e.g. Kim (2010), especially p. 479. Kim defines Henry Fielding's use of what he calls "satiric irony" as a foil to describe his sister Sarah's contrasting use of "sentimental irony".

superiority and sophistication on the part of both the ironist and the intended (that is, comprehending) interpreter – at the expense of some uncomprehending and thus excluded audience" (ibid.: 55).

This interplay of inclusion and exclusion characterizes sections [1] and [2] of the above passage. Reading is projected as being part of an in-group, by means of an invitation to join the ridiculing of Bridget's behaviour that is implied by the rather obviously ironic 'approval' of her pretensions to unselfish compliance and moral superiority. The collusive effect becomes even more pronounced in the second part in the use of the pronoun 'we'. I do not see a very pronounced exclusionary elitist in-group that is created by the irony itself. Its detection does not require any specialized information or extraordinarily subtle reading methods, so that any but the most naïve actual reader is included in the invitation to laugh at its target Bridget.[19] All the same, beyond that simple effect of irony the aggregation that is suggested by the passage also does have an exclusionary aspect, which in this case is rather obviously gendered. The reference to "a Wife, a Child, a Relation, or a Friend" suggests a male perspective, which is characterized as possessing rationality and sober judgement, in contrast to Bridget's (and, as the generalization suggests, typically feminine and/or immature) "Folly and Unreasonableness".[20] This gendered assignation of authority is reinforced by the content of the passage, which is, after all, about the patriarch Squire Allworthy's right to assert his wishes against his sister's selfish and improper preferences. So far, then, the employment of irony in the passage appears to fit with the traditional view of satirical irony as cementing the consensus of a moral majority.

Part [3], however, seems to sever the comfortable collusion between author and reader: now, it is the gap between the two that is emphasized. The hyperbole in this section again suggests that the statement is suffused with irony. Is the observation really that "deep"? Is the authorial audience really supposed to be "incapable" of detecting moral or psychological implications? In any case, the "rare" favour of an intrusive comment will be repeated on the following page. The focus has here shifted to an explicit characterization of the relationship between author and reader, but it is hard to pinpoint how this relationship is to be

---

19 In Hutcheon's terms, the use of irony has a "target" (something or someone that is ridiculed or evaluated in a negative way), but as a mode of communication it may also have a "victim": it can function to exclude and embarrass those who do not attribute it correctly and take what was being said at face value (Hutcheon 1995: 42–43).

20 These observations are indebted to Kate Flint's (1996) analysis of gendered reader address in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.

envisaged. Hutcheon (1995: 50) identifies a use of irony that she labels "self-protective", which can be interpreted either in a "positive" way, as "self-deprecating", or in a "negative" way, as "indirect self-promotion, even arrogance". Part [3] ridicules the claims to authority that can be made by the creator of the narrative text, but without really rejecting or undermining them. To my mind, the use of irony in this section perfectly fits Hutcheon's description of a type of irony that constitutes "a deliberate attempt to render [the speaker] invulnerable" (ibid.). The last part of the passage anticipates a challenge a reader or critic could launch against the authority expressed in the first two parts.

The irony in this section particularly gives rise to the impression that the metadiscursive comment in part [3] is supposed to be a reaction to (or forestalling of) possible queries or challenges about this way of writing on the part of the actual reader. Such an implicitly dialogic character of the diegetic and gnomic comments, I would argue, is not a rare characteristic specific to this passage only, or to texts employing irony, but a quality shared by all such comments. The metadiscursive comment provides a reaction (if not an answer) to the tacit questions the first two passages raise. I think this is a possible explanation for an interesting phenomenon noted by Fludernik (2003b: 27): that metadiscursive comments are often tagged onto diegetic or gnomic ones. By making the bid for invulnerability so transparent, Fielding implicitly raises the very issue of the novelist's vulnerability to criticism. In its progression from diegetic to gnomic to metadiscursive commentary as well as in its uses of irony, this passage humorously stages the obligation to explain and justify both content and form of the fictional work.

William Warner, who approaches Fielding's work from a cultural-historical point of view rather than by means of narrative analysis, comes to very similar conclusions about the novels' evocation of authority. He also highlights the performative aspect of Fielding's "theatrical foregrounding of the author" (1998: 266), which he, too, regards as a "play upon the authority of the author" (265) rather than a stable assertion of discursive control. Warner sees this performance as "a way to let [. . .] the social into his [Fielding's] text and acknowledge the crucial power and freedom of the reader" (261). By differentiating the various claims of authority that are juxtaposed in the narrator's discourse, and by tracing the social implications of irony, I have developed tools that will allow me to analyse how at different key times in the development of the novel, issues of readerly control or freedom are negotiated.

In the following case studies, authorial narration will be examined as one central way of reflecting on expectations and problems associated with the production and consumption of fiction at key moments in the history of the novel. The concept of a rhetorics of reading developed in this chapter, with its comple-

mentary pillars of the performance of authorship and the projection of reading stances, makes it possible to analyse the ways in which narrative perspective itself contributes to the assertion and exploration of novel reading as a cultural practice.

Part II

Chapter 3
The Ambivalent Rise of the Novel Reader: Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*

"The great issue for most students of the eighteenth-century novel", writes John Richetti (1996b: 2), "is why expectations for prose fiction seem to have shifted so clearly during the middle of the century, and why by the end of the century something called the novel very clearly exists in the minds of readers and writers". The story of the 'rise' of the English novel has been written, questioned, and revised time and again, even before Ian Watt coined the phrase and tied it to the fictions by Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. Many scholars have since contributed to a more inclusive and multi-facetted image of the origins of the modern English novel (especially influentially e.g. McKeon [1987], Armstrong [1987]; see also Blewett [2000]). In particular, there has been a growing interest in the formation of 'the novel' as a rhetorical process: "the emergence of a new kind of quite distinct fictional narrative, which defines itself, sometimes aggressively and polemically, by a process of rejection, modification, and transformation of previous forms of social storytelling" (Richetti 1996b: 2), has been described as a project of self-fashioning, an assertion of difference and superiority to other kinds of medial entertainment (see William Warner [1998]) or to older traditions of narrative such as the romance (see Langbauer [1990]).

My study continues and expands the conversation about 'the novel' as a self-defining cultural phenomenon by focussing on the way in which the emerging genre reflects on and shapes reading as a multi-facetted practice. The work I have selected as my starting point, Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote or The Adventures of Arabella* (published 1752), employs the quixotic plot in order to integrate debates about the purposes and effects of reading into a representation that not only entails but explicitly foregrounds the "rejection, modification, and transformation of previous forms" (Richetti 1996b) on many levels.

While *Don Quijote* was an important model and point of reference for many novelists in early- and mid-eighteenth-century England,[1] Lennox's work is the most elaborate mid-century representation centring on a quixotic figure *as a reader*. Books have a formative and troublesome effect on Lennox's protagonist

---

[1] Particularly prominent examples of explicit and extended adaptation include Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (already signalled in the long title *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams, written in imitation of the manner of Cervantes, the author of Don Quixote*) from 1742 and *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) by Tobias Smollett, who also translated Cervantes's text into English (1755).

Arabella, a young woman who has spent her childhood in an isolated castle with little company and who lacks experience with other people. Although she has enjoyed the advantages of a good private education in subjects such as music, dancing, and languages, her most important teachers have been the authors of French romances from the previous century, which she has inherited from her (long dead) mother. From these books, Arabella draws "all her Notions and Expectations", in particular the belief "that Love was the ruling Principle of the World; that every other Passion was subordinate to this; and that it caused all the Happiness and Miseries of life" (FQ 7). Lennox thus transposes the picaresque "adventures" of the Spanish original to the domestic sphere.

As with Cervantes's protagonist, the influence of books goes beyond installing a general frame of mind. The effects of reading manifest themselves in a multitude of particulars, as Arabella takes the romance heroines as models for her own conduct in a very literal way. She dresses like them, copies peculiarities of their language, and expects all men and women she meets to behave like the characters she has encountered in her reading. In short, her knowledge of social norms and particularly of the relations between the sexes stems from her books. The conflicts that result from Arabella's quixotic reading, accordingly, pertain to her encounters with the larger social world, in particular with men, whom she invariably sees as suitors and potential "ravishers". Not only does Arabella expose herself to ridicule, but she is also in danger of sabotaging her own future: her self-image as a romance heroine stands in the way of finding a suitable husband. While the typical plot in the works she likes to read revolves around romance, it also prescribes that the heroine must reject all concrete advances of her lover. Although the ideal candidate, Arabella's cousin Glanville, is introduced early in the novel, it is open until the end of the book whether she will finally accept him or whether he will eventually give up all hope of success. Before the two can marry, "the Cure of Arabella's Mind" (FQ 368) must be effected with the help of the "doctor", a clergyman who manages to convince her that she has misread the romances.

There are two obvious paths one can take in order to gauge the contribution of this representation of a reading dysfunction to the larger history of the emergence of the novel. One is to see the work as an anti-novel which channels contemporary anxieties about the increasingly popular medial practice of reading fiction. The other is to see it, conversely, as advocating the novel as a new type of narrative by parodying and thus devaluing an older type, the romance.

In the following sections, I argue that neither of these views does full justice to the complex ways in which the status, purposes, and effects of reading are negotiated in the novel. Ultimately, in my view, *The Female Quixote* does champion the reading of fiction as a significant cultural practice. However, it does not

do so by means of a simple juxtaposition of good and bad reading material or of serious and silly, male or female readers but by dramatizing and working through anxieties about fictional reading in general. For this argument, I draw on the readings especially of feminist critics, who have teased out the ambivalences of the novel in order to show that neither the heroine nor the romances she likes to read are as foolish as they might appear at first sight. Their findings serve as a basis for my own venture: to describe how the novel explores and relates views on reading as a cognitive process, an embodied act, social behaviour, and an institutionalized practice. *The Female Quixote* takes up and complicates stereotypical ways of thinking about reading (in particular, the ridiculous figure of the silly woman reader) and thus contributes to enlarging the cultural niche the novel genre was beginning to claim for itself in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Novel, Romance, and Reading around 1750

Any discussion of the text's reflections on the formation of the novel as a genre is obviously complicated by the fact highlighted by the quotation given at the beginning of this chapter: that 'the novel' – at all times a genre that has been difficult to define – was not yet a completely established term or concept in the middle of the eighteenth century.[2] "Romance", "history", and "novel" were all used to designate prose fiction, sometimes in ways that highlight contrasts between different kinds of texts, sometimes synonymously. At the same time, as McKeon notes, "alongside this confusion we can perceive a growing impulse to make the dyad 'romance/history' stand for an all-but-absolute dichotomy between opposed ways of knowing the world" (McKeon 2002: 25), manifested in different modes of writing. Langbauer (1990: 16–17), too, describes how these modes of writing were, in the course of the eighteenth century, increasingly distinguished by means of the dyad 'romance/novel' – typically in terms that were already delineated by William Congreve in the Preface to *Incognita* (1692). He juxtaposes romances, "where lofty Language, miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances, elevate and surprize the Reader into a giddy Delight",

---

2 See also e.g. John Paul Hunter (1996: 9–10). McKeon (2002: 25) contends that "it is [...] around the middle of the eighteenth century that 'the novel' becomes the dominant and standard term", but his observation that "seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century writers often use the terms 'romance', 'history' and 'novel' with an evident interchangeability that must bewilder and frustrate all modern expectations" (ibid.) still applies to works in the 1750s – *The Female Quixote* as well as Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* essay No. 4 (1750), which, as I will show, is an important foil to Lennox's view on fictional narrative.

with novels, which "represent to us Intrigues in practice, delight us with Accidents and odd Events, but not such as are wholly unusual or unpresidented [sic], such which not being so distant from our Belief bring also the pleasure nearer us" (Congreve 1922: 5).

This dyad has often been used to promote the special cultural status of 'the novel' – whether in prefaces by writers like Defoe and Richardson, who emphasize the 'factuality' and contemporaneity of their narratives, or in literary-historical accounts, most notably (again) Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, which is mainly concerned with emphasizing the *differences* between earlier forms of fictional writing and the novel form. For Watt, the novel is characterized by "formal realism", i.e. "the narrative embodiment of [...] the premise [...] that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particularity of the times and places of their actions" (Watt 1965: 32). Subsequently, however, studies have cast doubt on the adequacy of the novel/romance dyad for describing literary-historical developments: both McKeon (2002 [1987]) and Margaret Anne Doody (1996), for example, have highlighted the manifold continuities between prose fiction in the eighteenth century and earlier forms, thus complicating any notion of a straight-forward juxtaposition.

Consequently, Langbauer and Warner have described the novel/romance juxtaposition as rhetorical manoeuvring rather than objective description. As Warner puts it in *Licensing Entertainment*, "Watt's enlightenment narrative of the novel's rise [...] obscures the historical and cultural strife that produced 'the novel' as a coherent cultural object and then elevated its cultural address" (Warner 1998: 2).[3] In a similar vein, but from a more radically constructivist point of view, Laurie Langbauer (*Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel*, 1990) regards the distinction as a strategic move to define 'the novel' as a coherent entity. For eighteenth-century authors, "the utility of romance consisted precisely in its vagueness; it was the chaotic negative space outside the novel that determined the outlines of the novel's form" (Langbauer 1990: 63).[4]

---

3 My own use of the word 'novel' in this terminologically problematic period follows that suggested by Warner, who uses it "in an inclusive fashion to designate the books early modern readers term novels and the elevated novels of Richardson, Defoe and Fielding, which eschewed that label, but which tradition has considered formative instances of the novel as a literary type. This catholic usage refuses to allow the term 'novel' to have the gatekeeping function it usually has in literary studies, whereby it has filtered out noncanonical novels" (Warner 1998: xii).

4 My reading of Lennox is also informed by Ellen Gardiner's *Regulating Readers: Gender and Literary Criticism in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (1999), which examines the self-reflexive role of

The Female Quixote on the one hand centrally evokes the romance/novel dyad. Arabella's favourite reading, seventeenth-century French romances, are characterized in Congreve's terms: "lofty Language, miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances" (Congreve 1922: 5) are their hallmarks. *The Female Quixote* itself is clearly supposed to represent a more sober kind of writing. Much of the enjoyment in reading Lennox's work stems from the contrast between Arabella's outlandish interpretation of events and the more down-to-earth explanations the text itself furnishes: horsemen who suddenly appear in a street are not kidnappers but strangers minding their own business; a man who loiters around the fish pond in her garden is not a lovesick young nobleman in disguise planning to kill himself, but the gardener's assistant, planning to pinch one of her father's carp, and so on. Thus, it is implied that unlike Arabella's romances, *The Female Quixote* represents the commonplace events of real life. The impression of a significant contrast is further reinforced by numerous references to the "Lofty Language" of romances, which is presented as an object of ridicule.[5] Seen through the lens of Warner's and Langbauer's approaches, then, the text participates in the formation and elevation of 'the novel' as a new mode of writing by characterizing the romance as the novel's 'other'.

On the other hand, however, *The Female Quixote* features some aspects that contradict the notion of categorically different types of fictional writing. As many critics have pointed out – and as I will discuss in more depth in the following sections – the plot of *The Female Quixote* features aspects associated with the romance (see e.g. Lynch [1987], Volk-Birke [2001]), and it also depicts some of the effects of Arabella's romance obsession as positive (or at least ambivalent). The use of the word 'novel' itself can already be taken to signal a tendency to consider the continuities between older and newer types of narrative fiction. It occurs three times in the text. In the first instance, a character is described as someone who "was perfectly well acquainted with the chief Characters in most of the *French* Romances; [and] could tell every thing that was borrowed from them, in all the new Novels that came out" (FQ 129–30). Here, 'Novel' denotes a newer type of

---

the "novel as criticism" (1999: 11) in this period. Gardiner emphasizes that novelists use their fictional works in order to participate in the critical controversies about fictional narrative, and argues that these works are often deliberately set up against evaluations by professional literary critics.

5 Arabella herself talks in the roundabout and antiquated style of the books she has read. Her sentences are convoluted, contain large numbers of adjectives ("generous Cavalier", "unfortunate Fair One", "illustrious Unknown" and so on), and are scattered with references to her favourite characters ("Remember I require no more of you, than *Parisatis* did of *Lysimachus*", FQ 193). See Müller (1979) for a detailed analysis of Arabella's language.

narrative fiction, but one that is characterized by its affinity to rather than distinction from the romance. Moreover, since the character who is so familiar with these works is the villainous Sir George, Glanville's main rival for Arabella's affections, prose fiction in general is cast in a dubious light. The second instance is a meta-discursive commentary with a similar drift: "in order to place this momentous Affair in a true Light, 'tis necessary [...] to acquaint the Reader with what had passed in the Apartment; and also, following the Custom of the Romance and Novel-Writers, in the Heart, of our Heroine" (FQ 180). In this case, 'romance' and 'novel' are lumped together and characterized as narratives focussing on a protagonist's emotions. Finally, in the key scene in which Arabella is cured in the final part of the book, the doctor concedes that not *all* narrative fiction is bad reading: he draws an unfavourable comparison between Arabella's favourite works and the productions of "an admirable Writer of our own Time, [who] has found the Way to convey the most solid Instructions [...] in the pleasing Dress of a Novel" (FQ 377).[6] Although this is a case where a novel is actually praised, the doctor here foregrounds the extraordinary genius of one writer, who has managed to square the circle and make narrative fiction instructive. The word 'novel', then, is used consistently in a way that suggests that firstly, it denotes a kind of text that has affinities to the older text type of romance, and that secondly, reading any kind of fictional text is not a particularly well-regarded activity.

Langbauer has proposed that Lennox's novel mainly represents a struggle with the first problem: while actually retaining many romance features, *The Female Quixote* "itself constructs a literary tradition that breaks with an absurd past and saves its (woman) writer from shame: the verisimilitude and common-sensicalness of Lennox's novel reflect on past romances, and are meant to keep it from the contempt and ridicule that attend their silly stories" (1990: 69–70). I take a different approach: in my view, the main problem negotiated in the text is not how to distinguish and rank different kinds of fictional narrative, but the second problem, namely how to assess criteria for an evaluation of reading as a practice. The question of what *kind* of fiction one reads is, as I argue in the following sections, only one aspect considered in the novel – what appears as ultimately more important are the cognitive mode of the reader and the extent to which her reading is socially embedded. Arabella's reading represents both potential problems and benefits of leisure reading as a spreading cultural practice. Beyond its parodic targeting of a certain text type, then, *The Female Quixote* offers a sustained (partly serious, partly playful) engagement with concerns that were

---

6 The book is Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*; the significance of the reference is explored in more detail below.

widespread at the end of a period that had seen fundamental changes in the medial landscape.

These changes involved a shift from a "predominantly orally communicating society" in the mid-seventeenth century (Bach 1989: 258) to a commercialized media culture dominated by print. In terms of the production, circulation and consumption of books, the early eighteenth century can be seen as "pav[ing] the way for modern habits of reading" (Littau 2006: 21).[7] It saw a rapid expansion of the production of magazines, pamphlets and books, with the establishment and professionalization of an industry in which professions such as that of the writer, the printer, the critic, or the bookseller were clearly differentiated parts of a market economy, and in which institutions such as commercial libraries proliferated.[8] This was accompanied by a rise in literacy – by 1750, about 60 percent of adult men and 40 percent of adult women in England could read (cf. Hunter 1996: 20).[9] Private and solitary reading was in the process of becoming a wide-spread pastime, primarily for the middle classes.

As changes in media culture typically do, this development gave rise to fears as well as hopes.[10] As a successful product of the new media culture, 'the novel' in the eyes of many contemporary critics embodied the epitome of what was wrong with contemporary media production and consumption.[11] To read narrative fiction was regarded as a detrimental practice because it was seen as idle or as socially isolating, just as much as it could involve an encounter with harmful content – inciting desires, raising false expectations, or introducing poor role models (see Hunter 1996). Reading long narrative fiction in particular was seen as potentially dangerous for two distinct reasons. For one thing, its immersive effect – captured by the metaphor of 'reading fever', one of the catchwords of the debate in the eighteenth century – was already seen as harmful because of tendencies towards emotional excess (see Littau 2006: 39–42). It was also regarded as

---

7 Cf. also Gauger, who posits six different phases in the history of reading and dates the beginning of the last, "modern reading culture" (my translation), roughly around the beginning of the eighteenth century (1994: 38).

8 For a concise summary of the economic and social developments connected with the new print culture, see Raven (2005).

9 This more than doubled the percentage of literate people from the beginning of the seventeenth century – for women, the increase was even larger, see J.P. Hunter (1996: 20).

10 For a critical discussion of a general tendency to be either overly pessimistic or overly optimistic about the social effects of medial developments, see Giesecke (2007). Goetsch (1994: 5–22) gives a summary of the technological, sociological, and literary-historical aspects that played into the ambivalent evaluation of print culture in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

11 See e.g. J.P. Hunter (1996), Taylor (1943). Williams (1970) has assembled a collection of contemporary sources on fictional narrative which demonstrate this tendency.

problematic because of the more specific cognitive effects particular contents were supposed to have.

Lennox's representation of Arabella's reading evidently engages with these larger discussions. By using the metaphor of the 'cure' that is effected by the doctor in the final part, the novel places itself in the context of the 'reading fever' discussion. The effects of Arabella's reading are considered both in terms of their impact as a general type of behaviour or social practice and in terms of the particular impact of specific content, as her focus on love as a ruling principle clearly shows. In the following, I will examine which particular ideas about the dangers and benefits of reading the novel reflects, and how it thus puts forward a complex (and in part ambivalent) case on the effects and purposes of fiction.

Sex, Violence, and Arabella: Debating the Physical Impact of Reading

In the long discussion that leads to Arabella's cure at the end of the novel, the doctor represents the dangers of her reading in drastic terms:

> if we retire to a contemplation of Crimes, and continue in our Closets to inflame our Passions, at what time must we rectify our Words, or purify our Hearts? The immediate Tendency of these Books [...] is to give new Fire to the Passions of Revenge and Love [...]. These books soften the Heart to Love, and harden it to Murder. (FQ 380)

This accusation is what in the end convinces Arabella to accept that her reading has misled her. She concedes that she has indeed come close to encouraging "the Crime of deliberate unnecessary bloodshed": "I tremble to think how nearly I have approached the Brink of Murder, when I thought myself only consulting my own Glory" (both FQ 381). This refers to the last "adventure" of the novel, in which Glanville stabs his rival Sir George because he (mistakenly, as it turns out) thinks he has caught the latter in a clandestine meeting with Arabella. The culmination of the book in an actual act of violence seems to confirm the doctor's negative opinion about the influence of romances. The other part of the indictment – that books "soften the Heart to Love" – also seems to be accepted by Arabella, even if this point is left unexplored at the end of the novel. When the doctor points out that "Love [...] is the sole Business of Ladies in Romances", her "Blushes [...] hindered him from proceeding as he had intended", and he pays tribute to her "Delicacy" by switching back to the subject of violence (FQ 381).

The doctor's argument that reading "inflames passions" explicitly evokes the views of those critics of reading who feared the physical impact of reading as an

embodied act. A particularly vivid example is this passage from an early-eighteenth-century magazine, which links reading with sexual desire:

> Let not Romances come within reach of a young Lady: They are the Poison of Youth, and murther Souls as sure as Arsenick or Ratsbane kills Bodies. Their Style, Matter and Design are pointed against the Defense of Vertue. They sully the Fansie, over-heat Passion, and awake Folly; and like lewd Pictures, are the worse for being excellent. They kindle those Flames that cannot be extinguished without Trouble, nor entertained without a Crime [...].[12]

This passage uses both the metaphor of reading as a harmful substance that is ingested and of reading as generating heat (again related to the notion of 'reading fever') in order to highlight the involuntary physical processes it is supposed to trigger. The doctor's use of the same semantic field and the motif of Arabella's 'cure' seem to reinforce the idea that the most dramatic problem with reading fiction is its status as an embodied act which triggers physical reactions in the susceptible reader (and thus, most particularly, the vulnerable female reader). However, the fact that it is a logical debate that effects the cure already works against the image of Arabella as a hapless victim of her own inflamed passions – as Doody remarks, "the novelist pays the heroine the compliment of having her converted by reason and discourse" (1989: xxx). In many parts of the book, Arabella is represented as decidedly rational. Rather than representing the last word on her condition, the doctor's sermon on books as inflaming the passions draws attention to the ways in which the novel complicates rather than simply endorses ideas about reading as eliciting unmanageable emotions.

The claim that Arabella has been infected by the "Passion of Violence", to start with this point, can be linked to various earlier instances when she expresses her view on violent revenge. In chapter III.4, for example, she has a conversation with Glanville and his sister about one of her "adventures", in which she ran away to escape a suspected plot to abduct and "ravish" her. Now she wants Glanville to promise that he will kill the man she suspects, praising Glanville's "Valour":

> I am persuaded he will find no Difficulty in performing his Promise; and I make no question but I shall see him covered with the Spoils of the Impostor, who would have betrayed me; and I flatter myself, he will be in a Condition to bring me his Head, as he bravely promises, without endangering his own Life. (FQ 127)

---

12 Darrell in *Ladies' Supplement* to *The Gentleman Instructed*, pp. lxx–lxxi, 5th edition, 1713, quoted by J.P. Hunter (1977: 467). Such anxieties about the sexual impact of reading were voiced with regard both to 'romances' and 'novels' (see e.g. Paulson [1998: 62]).

She blithely dismisses Miss Glanville's objection that this would make her brother a murderer, insisting that "Heroes [...] may kill as many Men as they please" (FQ 128).

While all this does sound rather bloodthirsty, the scene is not designed to leave the impression that Arabella herself is susceptible to passions of violence and revenge that she cannot control. She is not represented as outraged, but rather as calmly arguing her points. Her 'heroic' language has a comic effect because it is clearly an imitation of her reading and because the things she describes so obviously contrast with her own sphere of experience – she has never been in contact with real violence. Nor does the passage suggest that Arabella might incite anybody else to violent behaviour, since the people around her clearly do not take her 'commands' seriously. If there is a problem caused by her reading, then, it is not so much the arousal of a dangerous passion but the impression that she is out of touch with reality.

The scene that really seems to support Arabella's final self-accusation is the one already mentioned above, in which Glanville stabs and nearly kills Sir George. His violent action almost brings him into the predicament his sister has anticipated: being regarded as a murderer. What is crucial for deciding whether this scene corroborates the doctor's judgment of Arabella's reading, however, is the question whether the novel suggests that there is a causal connection between her reading and Glanville's violence. If such a connection is suggested at all, it is only in a rather weak sense. Glanville's deed is not depicted as a response to a plea for protection on the part of Arabella; rather, he is "fir'd almost to Madness" by the idea that Sir George has hatched a plot against him and is trying to win Arabella himself (FQ 354) – a suspicion for which he has good reason, and which actually proves to be correct. Glanville only makes a mistake in thinking that Arabella has a secret meeting with Sir George – again with good reason, as he sees his rival with a woman dressed in Arabella's clothes, who, however, turns out to be Miss Glanville. In the scene itself, Glanville's act is not described as an outrageous offense but as a fitting punishment for Sir George, who himself admits as much ("I have deserv'd my Death from your Hand", FQ 357). Arabella's predilection for romances does play a minor role, as it is represented as the reason why she has not already accepted Glanville's proposal, and also because it makes her susceptible to Sir George's deceptions. However, the notion that her heart has been "hardened to Murder" or that she has incited Glanville to a "dreadful Worship of human Sacrifices" (FQ 380), as the doctor sees the effect of romances, seems like a dramatic overstatement.

The case of violence, then, shows that the power of romances to induce extreme emotions is played down in the representation of the characters' actions. This leaves the question whether the same can be said for the case of the "Passion of Love" (FQ 380), that is, the kindling of physical desire. Are there any allusions

to sexual misbehaviour on Arabella's part in *The Female Quixote*? Deborah Ross, for one, argues that "reading romances has made Arabella far too ready for love" and that the novel represents her as "seek[ing] sex" (Ross 1987: 462). She supports this argument with psychoanalytical readings of Arabella's movement through space as expressing her "sexual curiosity" – for example, a scene in which she runs away from her father's house, which "literally and symbolically preserves virginity" (ibid.). Ross makes a good point when she shows that in scenes like this, Arabella's professed motivation (to escape a 'ravisher') is at odds with the actual effect of her actions (i.e. exposing herself to rape by wandering around on her own). However, such contradictions have a rather more obvious purpose than to reveal subconscious desires: the point is that many of Arabella's actions and utterances *appear* as indecent to other people in the story.

There are several conversations between Arabella and Glanville's sister that foreground this problem. In one of them, Arabella inadvertently offends Miss Glanville by asking her to relate her "adventures", which Miss Glanville takes to refer to illicit love affairs. In order to defend herself against the supposed accusation, Miss Glanville pleads that "I never granted a Kiss without a great deal of Confusion" (FQ 89) – an admission that in turn shocks Arabella, to whom a kiss already is a "criminal" act. It thus turns out that while Arabella is the one who, according to the conventions of her time, appears to be knowing and forward because of the way she talks, she is completely naïve with regard to sexual matters. This innocence becomes especially manifest in her inability to perceive sexual misbehaviour even when it is explicitly presented to her. When she is told the story of Miss Groves, for example – malicious gossip intended by the teller to portray this woman as a promiscuous gold digger – Arabella's understanding is that this is a story of undeserved misfortune. She is characterized as "so little sensible of the Pleasure of Scandal, as to be wholly ignorant of its Nature" (FQ 77) – both good-natured and chaste, despite the appearance of 'knowingness'.

Miss Glanville serves as a contrast figure in this respect. That her knowledge of the current social codes is much superior to Arabella's is shown to great comic effect in a scene in which Arabella wants to visit Sir George, who, as she thinks, is mortally ill, suffering from dejection because she has rejected him. Miss Glanville protests that going to "pay Visits to Men in their Beds" (FQ 184) is an offense that "no Woman, who has any Reputation at all, will be guilty of taking" (FQ 183). The joke here is both on Miss Glanville, who promptly sees a sexual context in Arabella's proposal to visit a deathbed, and on Arabella herself, who not only dramatically misjudges the whole situation (Sir George, of course, is perfectly healthy), but also cannot defend herself against Miss Glanville's insinuations because she does not understand them. Seen from an outside perspective, Miss Glanville's judgment of impropriety is a reasonable reaction to appearances –

Arabella's visit to Sir George would be deemed highly inappropriate. The reference to "reputation", however, also already indicates that for Miss Glanville, appearance is the only important thing. Subsequently, she is the one who shows sexual interest in Sir George and seeks to win him for herself. She, who never touches a book of any kind, is represented as both a hypocrite and as a woman who lets herself be governed by sexual desire. In comparison, Arabella appears almost as a saint. While the novel thus clearly does engage with the notion that romance readers behave in a way that makes them susceptible to the charge of sexual misbehaviour, it links this impression not to the actual arousal of sexual passion, but to the contrast between appearance and reality.

Even though Lennox goes to great lengths to represent Arabella as chaste and innocent in spite of misleading appearances, there is yet another sense in which one can understand the doctor's comment about the "passion of love": we could infer that this refers not mainly to sexual desire, but to strong feelings in a more general sense. Maybe romances are emotionally unsettling and make Arabella generally nervous or highly strung. What would corroborate this idea is the explicit characterization in the expository chapter, which describes her as being "in a continual Anxiety by a Vicissitude of Hopes, Fears, Wishes, and Disappointments" (FQ 8). Her propensity for rash actions – running away from home, jumping into the river – could also be seen as an indication that she is emotionally unstable because of her romance reading.

Emotional instability, however, does not seem to be a satisfactory description of her character as it is represented in the majority of passages in the book. Arabella does not fit the bill of a silly young girl whose head is turned by thoughts of love. At the very beginning of the novel, for instance, her first encounter with a potential suitor is described. Mr Hervey is on a visit to his cousin and admires Arabella at church. The cousin encourages his interest and suggests that although Arabella is from a very rich family, Hervey has a good chance of convincing her to marry him, as the "poor Girl [...] never had a lover in her Life; and therefore the first Person who addresses her has the fairest Chance for succeeding" (FQ 9). This image of an inexperienced young girl raises the expectation that Arabella will be overwhelmed by the whole situation and is thus in danger of becoming an easy prey to emotional manipulation. The passage that presents this outside assessment of Arabella's expected reaction is immediately followed by an instance of psychonarration detailing Arabella's thoughts. This part presents a reaction that considerably differs from that envisaged by Hervey's cousin:

> Arabella, in the mean time, was wholly taken up with the Adventure, as she called it, at
> Church: The Person and the Dress of the Gentleman who had so particularly gazed on her
> there, was so different from what she had been accustomed to see, that she immediately

> concluded, he was of some distinguished rank. It was past a Doubt, she thought, that he was excessively in Love with her; and as she soon expected to have some very extraordinary Proofs of his Passion, her Thoughts were wholly employed on the Manner in which she should receive him. (FQ 10)

While Arabella is certainly very much involved in this episode ("wholly taken up"), it is striking how much she also seems in control of her own responses. Her reactions are not presented in terms of emotions, but in terms of conclusions and expectations which stem from a very clear idea of what is going to happen and what role she is expected to play in this romance scenario. In this passage as in many others that follow, Arabella ascribes an excess of emotions to other persons, but her own feelings are mainly limited to compassion for their suffering or exasperation if they do not follow her script. Neither do her 'rash' actions have to be seen as indicators of emotional instability. They may appear as hysterical to the people around Arabella, but this is only because they know that her premises are false and the situations she sees as threatening are actually harmless. If Arabella were right in her interpretation of her perceptions, her actions – for example, jumping into a river to escape a physical assault – would not seem absurd. Karin Kukkonen (2014), in a cognitive-narratological reading of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine*, supplies an in-depth analysis of how quixotic readers apply patterns from their reading to the world in which they live. Kukkonen describes this as a process that involves highly developed skills involving counterfactual reasoning and calculation of probabilities. Such advanced reasoning skills are also attributed to the heroine of *The Female Quixote*.

The "great Calmness" (FQ 20) which is Arabella's trademark reaction to situations in which her expectations have not been fulfilled is starkly contrasted with her loss of composure at the end of the novel. When she thinks that Glanville has betrayed her, she finally experiences overwhelming emotions:

> Our charming Heroine, ignorant till now of the true State of her Heart, was surpriz'd to find it assaulted at once by all the Passions which attend disappointed Love. Grief, Rage, Jealousy and Despair made so cruel a War in her gentle Bosom, that unable either to express or to conceal the strong Emotions with which she was agitated, she gave Way to a violent Burst of Tears. (FQ 349)

Compared to this, all the earlier 'adventures' with their exciting (if mostly imaginary) plots have not fazed Arabella – it seems as if the romances, rather than making her more susceptible to strong emotions, have had the opposite effect and made her impervious.

The notion that reading may incite dangerous passions and emotional upheaval, then, is clearly not the main problem with reading as it is represented in most parts of the novel. Contemporary anxieties about the inflammatory impact of

reading are represented in the novel, but overall it promotes an image of the reader as cognitively involved in her reading rather than emotionally enslaved by it. What is described as a particularly important issue is a gap between inside and outside: Arabella has problems understanding other people's actions – and is in turn misunderstood – because her reading has instilled wrong beliefs about their motivations and priorities. This aspect evokes the concept of fictional reading as a process of gaining insights into human nature, as the authorial narrator in *Tom Jones*, to name one prominent example, advertises his offering to the reader in the first chapter. The next section will examine more closely in what way *The Female Quixote* endorses contemporary views on such purposes of fictional reading and thereby emphasizes the potential of reading as a cognitive process.

Models of Virtue? Lennox and Johnson

That the protagonist's understanding of the world around her is affected by her reading is already highlighted in the first chapter, in the narratorial commentary explaining that her books furnish Arabella with "all her Notions and Expecta-tions" (FQ 7). A later chapter provides a more specific description of these "Notions" in a dialogue in which the virtue of Arabella's favourite fictional characters is explicitly challenged:

> 'Tis certain therefore, Madam, added the Countess with a Smile, that what was Virtue in those Days, is Vice in ours: And to form a Hero according to our Notions of 'em at present, 'tis necessary to give him Qualities very different from *Oroondates*.
> The secret Charm in the Countenance, Voice, and Manner of the Countess, join'd to the Force of her Reasoning, could not fail of making some Impression on the Mind of *Arabella*; but it was such an Impression as came far short of Conviction. She was surpriz'd, embarrass'd, perplex'd, but not convinc'd. Heroism, romantick Heroism, was deeply rooted in her Heart; it was her Habit of thinking, a Principle imbib'd from Education. She could not separate her Ideas of Glory, Virtue, Courage, Generosity, and Honour, from the false Representations of them in the Actions of *Oroondates*, *Juba*, *Artaxerxes*, and the rest of the imaginary Heroes. (FQ 329, emphases original)

The passage makes explicit what elsewhere in the text is staged in various examples: that Arabella regards the "Heroes" (and also the heroines) of the texts she reads as models of conduct. She seeks to comprehend the principles of their behaviour and replicate them as closely as possible in her own actions.

In her desire to extract moral lessons from her reading – if not in the choice of the concrete role models – Arabella acts out prescriptions that were central to extra-literary debates about fictional reading at the time. The issue is addressed from the viewpoint of contemporary literary criticism by Samuel Johnson, who

was part of Lennox's acquaintance in literary London, in his *Rambler* essay No. 4, dated March 31, 1750. Johnson contends that authors of fiction should endeavour to be "just copyrs of human manners" for a particular purpose: their texts are supposed to "serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life" (Johnson 1969: 20–21). The value of representations, according to Johnson, is thus to be judged in terms of their moral impact. *The Female Quixote* takes up the influential Johnsonian view of fictional reading by making the moral issue a pivot of the quixotic plot. This point is highlighted by the introduction of the doctor as a character whose style of speaking and opinions are clearly recognizable as Johnsonian (see Isles 1967).[13] I would argue, however, that the novel goes several steps further than Johnson in exploring the idea that it is the task of fiction to furnish moral exemplars.

Johnson's essay, which critically responded to the success of novels by authors like Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett (see Taylor 1943: 91), has often been read as an example of a predominantly negative view of the novel as a genre (see e.g. Hunter 1996: 20–21; Taylor 1943: 93). Ioan Williams even regards it as "the first substantial attack on realism of character and action" (Williams 1970: 14). This impression is to a great extent due to Johnson's often-quoted description of the novel's target audience, "the young, the ignorant, and the idle", for whom the works provide "entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas" (Johnson 1969: 21). The essay certainly suggests that works of fiction do not require as much learning and effort as the poetical, philosophical, or historical works recommended for a traditional education in the classics. At the same time, however, Johnson acknowledges their potentially greater impact: "familiar histories may perhaps be made of greater use than the solemnities of professed morality, and convey the knowledge of vice and virtue with more efficacy than axioms and definitions" (ibid.: 22).[14]

---

13 Both Johnson and Samuel Richardson were corresponding with Lennox about the novel while she was writing it. Some critics have put forward the idea that Johnson himself wrote the 'cure' chapter (see e.g. Paulson 1998: 171; discussion in Small [1969: 79–82]), but as Isles (1989: 422) argues, there is no proof for this speculation. Isles himself rejects it on the grounds that "the dialogue and argument are far below Johnson's standard" (1989: 422), which to me seems debatable, but one can also read the Johnson conjecture as another typical instance of the propensity of critics to see female authors as dependent on their male peers' help (see e.g. the case of Sarah Fielding's *David Simple*, where until recently the version that was 'corrected' by her brother Henry was seen as the authoritative text, whereas now scholars tend to prefer the first edition). Cf. Anna Uddén's (2008) discussion of the ending of *The Female Quixote* and the tendency to underestimate women's writing skills.

14 Johnson scholars also point out that Johnson himself was well-read in romances and novels, see e.g. DeMaria (1997: 186–196).

While the essay reflects some facets of conservative criticism of the novel, then, it also combines such criticism with a legitimation of the novel as a potentially important moral institution. This view extends to fictional writing on both sides of the novel-romance divide, but the idea of a distinction between old and new kinds of prose writing does play a significant role in Johnson's argument:

> In the romances formerly written, every transaction and sentiment was so remote from all that passes among men, that the reader was in very little danger of making any applications to himself; the virtues and crimes were equally beyond his sphere of activity; and he amused himself with heroes and with traitors, deliverers and persecutors, as with beings of another species, whose actions were regulated upon motives of their own, and who had neither faults nor excellencies in common with himself. But when an adventurer is levelled with the rest of the world, and acts in such scenes of the universal drama, as may be the lot of any other man; young spectators fix their eyes upon him with greater attention, and hope by observing his behaviour and success to regulate their own practices, when they shall be engaged in the like part. (Johnson 1969: 21)

Although Johnson does not use the word 'novel', he comments on the emergence of a kind of writing which he sees as being mainly characterized by its attempt to "exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind" (ibid.: 19).[15] This kind of writing, he argues, requires more skill and observation on the part of the writer than the older type of romances with their reliance on supernatural occurrences and improbable plots (see ibid: 20).

To the goal of moral education, the realist type of fiction offers both advantages and dangers. Johnson follows the traditional idea that the protagonists of fiction provide examples that are copied by the reader.[16] In his eyes, the fact that a character in a novel appears closer to the everyday life of the audience than the romance hero makes the former a much more powerful model than the latter, whose "virtues and crimes were equally beyond his [the reader's] sphere of activity" (Johnson 1969: 21). It is this very point, however, that he regards as a fundamental problem. Proximity to real life, after all, does not in itself guarantee moral excellence but can even pose a danger, which calls for a careful proceeding on the part of the author: "it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature,

---

15 In Johnson's terminology, the new writing is described as a subspecies of romance and labelled 'comedy of romance' – another example showing that 'novel' was not yet a commonly used term even with commentators who sought to categorize the 'new' kind of writing. It also shows that 'romance' was not necessarily associated with an 'old' style of writing. Cf. also Williams (1970: 1–2) on the Aristotelian terminology of critics at the time.

16 See e.g. Dryden (1987).

which are most proper for imitation" (ibid.: 22). The freedom the writer of fiction has to select his material – not being under the obligation to offer a full record of events – should be used in the service of moral education.

The rules of selection that Johnson then proposes for good fictional writing are not easily conformable to a realist agenda, since he disapproves of writers who "mingle good and bad qualities" in their main characters (ibid.: 23). According to Johnson, these writers "confound the colours of right and wrong, and instead of helping to settle their boundaries, mix them with so much art, that no common mind is able to disunite them" (ibid.: 24). Instead of mixed characters, they should present "the most perfect idea of virtue" (ibid.). It is not easy to see how such a prescription should be reconcilable with a realist type of fiction, which Johnson himself describes as presenting protagonists who are "levelled with the rest of the world" rather than "beings of another species, [...] who had neither faults nor excellences in common with [the reader]" (ibid.: 21). This character model, then, fits the old type of fiction better than the new one.[17] Johnson was obviously aware of the problem. He stresses that while the selection he proposes may go against "historical veracity", which has no place in either the old or the new kind of fiction anyway, the virtue thus depicted should not be "angelical" or "above probability" (ibid.: 24). He still insists, however, that it should be an ideal virtue: "the highest and purest that humanity can reach" (ibid.). This makes clear that he is not concerned with the question of how people usually behave but with the highest standard of behaviour that could be wished for. The standard is set so high that the distinction from an 'angelic' character appears almost negligible.

Johnson's stance towards the novel as a more realistic type of writing is thus clearly ambivalent – realist portrayal of character is desirable insofar as it connects with the reader's own sphere of experience, but undesirable insofar as it obscures moral lessons. As practical advice to the writer of fiction, Johnson's essay is not particularly helpful after all. It outlines a quandary rather than suggesting a solution to the question of how characters can be drawn as both life-like and as unimpeachable moral models. Johnson, like Lennox, felt that if there was an author who had managed to square this circle, it was Samuel Richardson.[18] The passage from *The Female Quixote* in which the doctor refers to *Clarissa* as a rare

---

17 Cf. Ross (1987: 457): "[w]hile endorsing the new fiction [...], he [Johnson] also directed the novelist to polarize values and preserve perfect justice – in a sense to present a romantic rather than a realistic world."

18 See DeMaria (1997: 189), who points out that at the same time, Johnson himself did not have much taste for purely didactic fiction: "Johnson could announce books like Bunyan's and Richardson's as his favorites because they justify and redeem their pleasures with moral teaching, but the pleasures may have been what kept him reading. [...] [I]f Johnson liked pure morality in

example of morally excellent fiction (already briefly described above) directly quotes from the *Rambler* to this effect:

> [a]n 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, and, to use the Words of the greatest Genius in the present Age, 'Has taught the Passions to move at the Command of Virtue'. (FQ 377)[19]

Arabella embodies the Johnsonian quandary both in a positive and in a negative sense. On the one hand, she is an ideal reader insofar as she is motivated by the earnest desire for moral instruction. On the other hand, she represents the vulnerability of the naive reader, who is harmed by her inability to choose the best material for instruction and to take a sufficiently balanced attitude towards the material she does select. Lennox's novel explores both facets of the issue in depth by presenting Arabella's interactions with three characters who are presented as foils to her way of reading: Miss Glanville, Sir George and the Countess.

Charlotte Glanville's "Reading had been very confined" (FQ 82) and the only kind of narrative she is interested in is gossip. She thus comes to serve as a negative example of a woman completely lacking in (literary) education. This is already emphasized in the passage in which she is first introduced:

> As Miss *Charlotte* had a large Share of Coquetry in her Composition, and was fond of Beauty in none of her own Sex but herself, she was sorry to see Lady *Bella* possessed of so great a Share; and, being in Hopes her Brother had drawn a flattering Figure of her Cousin, she was extremely disappointed at finding the Original so handsome.
> *Arabella*, on the contrary, was highly pleased with Miss *Glanville*; and, finding her Person very agreeable, did not fail to commend her Beauty: A sort of Complaisance mightily in Use among the Heroines, who knew not what Envy or Emulation meant. (FQ 80)

The reference to romance heroines in the last paragraph serves to link Arabella's generosity to her reading and thus to suggest that in this instance, her use of romance heroines as role models is to be seen in a positive way.[20]

---

fiction, he might have said something kinder about William Congreve's *Incognita*, the object of his deathless pronouncement 'I would rather praise it than read it.'"

19 To my mind, this passage supports Isles's contention that Lennox ventriloquized Johnson in this chapter but should still be regarded as the author – it seems that this laudatory reference would have been in bad taste if Johnson himself had written the chapter.

20 One can detect a slight ironical twist in the adverb "mightily", which seems to make fun of the "Complaisance", as if such behaviour were in fact an empty gesture. However, there is nothing in the rest of the narrative to suggest that Arabella is not completely sincere in this kind of generosity. What is suggested instead is that Miss Glanville suspects her of hypocrisy because she

Miss Glanville's character defects may not have been *caused* by her lack of interest in books, but it is suggested that her self-centredness and her condescending attitude towards Arabella's reading are closely connected. Indeed, her character can be regarded as anticipating the case Mary Wollstonecraft makes for female novel reading (inferior to other kinds of reading, but still better than no reading) a few decades later, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792):

> any kind of reading I think better than leaving a blank still a blank, because the mind must receive a degree of enlargement and obtain a little strength by a slight exertion of its thinking powers; besides, even the productions that are only addressed to the imagination, raise the reader a little above the gross gratification of appetites, to which the mind has not given a shade of delicacy. (Wollstonecraft 2009: 193)

The idea that Arabella's interest in the moral models provided by her books, while problematic, is still far preferable to Miss Glanville's vapid state of self-centredness is emphasized further in the last part of the book, where Arabella finally visits London. She is described as "strangely disappointed to find no Lady with whom she could converse with any tolerable Pleasure: And that instead of Clelia's, Statira's, Mandana's, &c. she found only Miss Glanville's among all she knew" (FQ 341). Arabella herself generalizes on this state of affairs towards the end of the novel, when the doctor tells her that "your Writers have instituted a World of their own, and that nothing is more different from a human Being, than Heroes or Heroines". "I am afraid, Sir," she replies, "that the Difference is not in Favour of the present World" (FQ 380). Finally, it is not the romance reader Arabella but the non-reader Miss Glanville who engages in immoral behaviour when agreeing to a clandestine meeting with Sir George.

The characterization of Miss Glanville thus reinforces the idea that even those values which are instilled by Arabella's partly deficient reading are superior to many of the examples of conduct the protagonist encounters when she finally engages with larger society. A similar line of argument is developed in depth by Scott Paul Gordon, for whom *The Female Quixote* insists that "the romance values of 'Glory, Virtue, Courage, Generosity, and Honour' not only exist, but can be learned from romance" (Gordon 1998: 510). Gordon convincingly situates this positive evaluation of "romance values" in a prominent eighteenth-century debate over "virtue". He interprets it as a critique of the theory of self-interest exemplified in the works of Mandeville, which centres on the controversial

---

has no other way of accounting for generous behaviour. If we do detect a condescendence against romances in this passage, it seems to be aligned with the cynical outlook of people like Miss Glanville.

contention that all behaviour can be traced back to self-love. "Virtue", in this view, is a label given to self-interested behaviour that coincides with the interests of the larger community. Arabella's adherence to romance, then, implies a rebuttal of this new view of virtue; her "disinterestedness", in the sense of "preferring another's interest over one's own", is also what lies "at the heart of the English tradition of romance" (Gordon 1998: 502). From this perspective, the fact that the world of the romances is so far removed from reality, as Arabella points out, may even be seen as an asset rather than a problem; the marked contrast serves to emphasize societal defects.

Arabella's superiority over Miss Glanville also extends to other areas: the first scene immediately establishes that she is better educated by means of a conversation in which she lectures her cousin about the Olympic Games (of which Miss Glanville has never heard). Arabella's advantage is associated mainly with non-literary reading, but it is suggested that romances, which she treats as history books, also are important sources.[21] Her literary reading is also connected with her brilliant conversation skills, which are again emphasized with the help of the foil character: "Miss Glanville [...] was inwardly vexed at the Superiority her Cousin's Wit gave her over herself" (FQ 204). Miss Glanville's "confined Reading" is thus associated not only with a lack of general knowledge but also with a lack of the coveted ability to display wit in conversation.

By contrasting the two women in terms not only of moral character but also of intellect and education, the novel represents the latter two as highly desirable qualities in a young woman and also suggests a connection between moral development and intellectual education. As later in Wollstonecraft, the development of reason is understood as the foundation of positive character development. The difference in the two women's moral stature is visible even in their everyday occupations: "Miss Glanville (to whom all they said was quite unintelligible) diverted herself with humming a tune, and tinkling her Cousin's Harpsichord; which proved no Interruption to the more rational Entertainment [i.e. discussing Grecian history] of her Brother and Arabella" (FQ 83).

The second character whose mainly negative features serve as a foil to explore the positive effects of romances on Arabella's moral development is Sir George. He is described as "perfectly well acquainted with the chief Characters in most of the French Romances" (FQ 129) – a case in point for the refutation of the

---

21 Cf. Sharon Smith Palo (2006), who argues that with *The Female Quixote*, Lennox intervenes in a controversial contemporary debate about the impact romances had on women's education. As Smith Palo sees it, the novel suggests that romance reading might be responsible for Arabella's "superior intellect and imagination" (2006: 206), but at the same time, she thinks that it is ultimately ambivalent on the effects of romance reading.

notion that only women read fiction, and particularly romance fiction. In contrast to the other men who are interested in Arabella, he is not puzzled, disturbed, or deterred by her peculiar state of mind but "resolved to profit by the Knowledge of her Foible" (FQ 120). His motives are base; he wants to marry Arabella mainly because of her fortune (FQ 129). Sir George thus represents a contrast to Arabella's desire for moral education in romance reading: he has a utilitarian attitude towards these works.

Fittingly, he tries to manipulate Arabella by means of fiction. There is a long sequence (the whole of book VI) in which Sir George tells a story "in the Stile of Romance" (FQ 209), which is designed to convince Arabella that he is a romantic hero worthy of her love. He imitates the pattern and the language of the genre and thinks that he will recommend himself to Arabella when he tells her of brave deeds in the service of women he adored. This episode, in which Arabella becomes the narratee of an intradiegetic story, replicates and illuminates fundamental issues that are raised with regard to her status as a reader of fiction. She does not see through the cynical deception and accepts his story as real, but, interestingly, Sir George still fails to achieve his aims. The aspect of the story Arabella focuses on is not the courage he talks about but the fact that he has fallen in love with a succession of women rather than one. As Margaret Anne Doody points out, Sir George has missed "the point of Romance": "The duty of the male lover is to be constant. Sir George has, unconsciously, reflected in his fiction his real attitude to women" (Doody 1989: xxviii). Because he sees and uses the romances merely as vehicles for self-representation, Sir George does not anticipate a reading that involves a moral standard beyond the display of passion and bravery. Like the doctor, he does not understand romance reading as a vehicle for moral self-instruction. For Arabella, on the other hand, the teachings of her reading go deeper, and for this reason she is able to see that Sir George's tale reveals his calculating character.

The episode thus shows two people making very different uses of the same reading material. On the one hand, it suggests that Arabella's literal reading of the romances makes her vulnerable to the deceptions of a person who will use them for selfish aims. On the other hand, however, the contrast between Arabella and Sir George also suggests that it is possible to extract moral lessons from romance, and in this first direct confrontation between Arabella and Sir George, reading for moral improvement is allowed to prevail.[22] At first sight, it might seem

---

22 That this does not completely counterbalance Arabella's problems with judgment, however, is emphasized by Sir George's second attempt at winning Arabella, in which he has adjusted his strategy. In the last part of the book, he enlists a woman who pretends to be the "Princess of Gaul" and identifies Glanville as her unfaithful lover. Sir George thus directly uses the charge that has

as if this contrast reinforces traditional gendered notions about reading, summed up by Pawlowicz as a "dialectic of production and consumption, active and passive, male and female" (Pawlowicz 1995: 45). Sir George, one could argue, represents an active male mode of reading, while Arabella's attitude towards her romances is more passive. However, the outcome of the episode questions rather than reinforces this dialectic – neither character, it seems, can be adequately labelled merely 'active' or 'passive' in his or her reading stance. Both make creative use of romance contents, and both uses of reading are problematic to a certain extent. Where Sir George's motivations are selfish, however, Arabella's are benevolent.

A third character whose relation to reading is used as a foil for Arabella is the Countess. She appears only very briefly – in three chapters – but is nonetheless a significant figure for the conceptualization of reading in *The Female Quixote*, as she finally represents a wholly positive model for reading romance. She is introduced with a catalogue of desirable attributes, as a "Lady, who among her own Sex had no Superior in Wit, Elegance and Ease, [and] was inferior to very few of the other in Sense, Learning, and Judgment" and is further characterized by "[h]er Candour, her Sweetness, her Modesty and Benevolence" (FQ 323). This ideal figure thus displays those qualities that are also depicted as positive in Arabella, but with the added benefit of experience of the world. The Countess immediately grasps Arabella's condition because she herself was an expert reader of romances when she was young and "but for an early Acquaintance with the World, and being directed to other Studies, was likely to have been as much a Heroine as Lady Bella" (FQ 323). Rather than condemning romances (like the doctor), she represents a balanced attitude towards them, seeking to draw Arabella's attention to the differences between the world they describe and contemporary society, and more particularly the discrepancy in notions of virtue.

The ensuing dialogue between the Countess and Arabella is especially interesting because it explicitly raises the issue of the relation between virtue as a moral quality and as a form of social behaviour. The Countess introduces the concept of 'custom' to explain to Arabella why her heroines can be virtuous and at the same time unsuitable as models for imitation: "Custom [...] changes the very Nature of Things, and what was honourable a thousand Years ago, may probably be look'd upon as infamous now [...]. The same Actions which made a Man a Hero in those Times, would constitute him a Murderer in these" (FQ 328).

---

been directed against himself and turns Arabella's sense of female loyalty against his rival. This time, Arabella is deceived, and the plot is only discovered after the show-down in which Glanville stabs Sir George.

In evoking custom, the Countess repeats a point that has already been made by Miss Glanville, who rejects the heroines' example on the grounds that they live in far-away countries: "What signifies what Foreigners do? I shall never form my Conduct, upon the Examples of Outlandish People; what is common enough in their Countries, would be very particular here" (FQ 184). The significant difference between Miss Glanville's and the Countess's evocation of custom is that Miss Glanville is solely interested in reputation (and unwittingly displays her narrow-mindedness by concentrating on a point that seems peripheral here). The Countess, by contrast, mounts both a pragmatic and a moral case in the defence of custom. For one thing, she notes that "[t]ho' the Natures of Virtue and Vice cannot be changed, [...] yet they may be mistaken" (FQ 328) – a point that the novel has already demonstrated several times. She also, however, insists that (the question of appearance put aside) all is not relative: the heroes from Arabella's stories also fail to exemplify "the Rules of Christianity, and our present Notions of Honour, Justice, and Humanity" (FQ 328).

Although the Countess has a sympathetic and differentiated view of both Arabella and romance reading, in her understanding Arabella's mistake appears a good deal more serious than merely a too literal understanding of fiction, or, as Gordon would have it, a "*local* misapplication of concepts the text *generally* endorses" (1998: 507, emphasis original). In equating 'virtue' with a specific type of behaviour, Arabella herself is not sufficiently able to distinguish between the way in which a person acts and the moral values his or her actions are based on. The main problem with her education is that it has not provided her with the most important moral compass for conduct: a sound Christian faith. The Countess's take on the romance thus allows a differentiation for Arabella's problem of role models. It has a pragmatic dimension (i.e. the question of dress/fashion and of expressing oneself) which is important mainly because it is the basis of social communication. It also has a moral dimension, and while the novel (as detailed in the previous section) provides no evidence that Arabella has committed a base act, she is in danger of doing so because of her failure to put the Christian system of morals above all other notions of 'virtue'.

The episode with the Countess points to an issue that goes beyond the question of how certain contents of her specific reading influence Arabella: it highlights the extent to which reading needs to be seen as a socially embedded practice. This point is further illustrated by the Countess's own biography as a reader. As she herself emphasizes, her attitude towards reading was determined by "an early Acquaintance with the World, and *being directed* to other Studies" (FQ 323, my emphasis). Arabella, in her encounter with books, is without guidance and also without a conversation partner – her idiosyncratic way of reading is an effect and a reflection rather than the cause of her social isolation. Not only

does the character of the Countess function as a foil that highlights this difference, but the encounter between the two also briefly supplies Arabella with the very things she lacks, namely parental guidance and an informed equal in discussions about her favourite reading. This plot strand breaks off rather suddenly,[23] but taken together with the final part of the novel, in which the conversation with the doctor 'cures' Arabella, it suggests that the choice of reading material in itself only has a limited effect, and that reading must always be regarded as part of a larger social interaction.

In sum, then, the novel stages an in-depth exploration of the idea that narrative fiction can and should supply models of moral conduct, highlighting its potential to do so, but also the problems and contradictions that are already inherent in Johnson's essay. Lennox has indeed, as Sabine Volk-Birke (2001: 82) puts it, "been able to turn the romance conventions which she seems to debunk to excellent use in her own novel." The problem of instruction, as it is represented in *The Female Quixote*, goes beyond demonstrating the 'right' kind of behaviour and cannot be solved by the shift from 'fanciful' romance to 'realist' novel. The cognitive effects of reading, as especially the analysis of Arabella's encounter with the Countess shows, are seen as intricately connected with the way in which the activity is embedded in a social context.

Great Expectations? Reading as a Socially Embedded Practice

There are two ways in which *The Female Quixote* highlights the social character of reading fiction as a problem. For one thing, the plot revolves around the idea that narrative instils ideas about the individual's place in society and thus emphasizes the cognitive effects of reading. Second, and maybe less obviously, the conflicts in the novel emphasize the social character of reading as a type of behaviour. Arabella's encounters with the two most important men in her life – her father and her suitor Glanville – are the central scenes in which the novel explores these two aspects and their interconnection.

Beyond furnishing the moral models the protagonist directly imitates, her romance novels also install blueprints for identity by suggesting how social life

---

23 Isles speculates that the ending, which according to the correspondence between Lennox and Richardson deviated from Lennox's original plan for the novel, was first intended to be "gradual, and based on a continuation of the Countess's attempt to cure Arabella, which begins so promisingly and yet is abandoned so abruptly and oddly" (Isles 1989: 426).

works and what constitutes 'normal' behaviour. Contemporary critics of novel reading saw this type of influence as particularly pernicious, as raising "false expectations about life", in particular "threaten[ing] parental authority over matchmaking and marriage" (Hunter 1977: 464). It is in relation to the character of the Marquis that reading is most clearly represented as a challenge to patriarchal authority. This is especially evident in Arabella's reaction to her father's request that she should consider her cousin Glanville as a prospective husband:

> The Impropriety of receiving a Lover of a Father's recommending appeared in its strongest Light. What Lady in Romance ever married the Man that was chose for her? In those Cases the Remonstrances of a Parent are called Persecutions; obstinate Resistance, Constancy and Courage; and an Aptitude to dislike the Person proposed to them, a noble Freedom of Mind which disdains to love or hate by the Caprice of others. (FQ 27)

The irony signals in this passage suggest a comic element of ludicrous exaggeration on Arabella's part. In particular, the hyperbolic language and the incongruity of the word 'impropriety' indicate that Arabella's view is not to be taken at face value. The reason for her refusal is the desire to follow a different set of conventions – the model of romance, which dictates that "her Lover should purchase her with his Sword from a Croud of Rivals; and arrive to the Possession of her Heart by many Years of Services and Fidelity" (ibid.). This model inverts the value system of her time, which would see nothing 'improper' in a young daughter following her parents' advice.

The extravagance of Arabella's rebellion against her father is emphasized in even stronger terms in a passage a few pages later, in which Arabella resolves to run away in order to escape "a tyrannical exertion of parental Authority, and the secret Machinations of a Lover, whose Aim was to take away her Liberty, either by obliging her to marry him, or by making her a Prisoner" (FQ 35). The characterization of Arabella's father as a tyrant and Glanville as a schemer are both, as the descriptions of their behaviour make clear, misrepresentations – neither of the two intends to force Arabella to act against her own inclinations. It is Arabella who, through her reading, "has threatened the order and stability of the world around her" (Kvande 2011: 229).

However, there also are indications that Arabella's wariness of marriage is not completely misguided. While the plot with its numerous 'adventures' does stress the problems and dangers to which Arabella exposes herself when she refuses to follow her father's script for her life, the novel also represents the ways in which that script may in itself be disadvantageous or questionable. I have already referred to the very first 'adventure' in the book, which shows how Arabella is targeted by the fortune hunter Hervey, who is (luckily for her) repelled by her unaccountable behaviour. The case of Sir George's attempt to win her with

the help of a romance story is another instance of a predatory suitor. In both cases, Arabella is saved neither by the judgment of her guardians nor by her own discernment of the men's true intentions, but by the standards imposed by her reading.

What is more unequivocally problematic is the Marquis's relation to Arabella's reading as a social practice. If there is a figure in the novel who can be seen as responsible for Arabella's immersion in romance, it is the Marquis himself. For one thing, the books are in the library because Arabella's mother used them to escape the solitude her husband imposed on her by moving to a remote castle.[24] Moreover, after his wife's death he fails to supervise his daughter's education properly, so that she can devote most of her time to this kind of reading and has no knowledge of the outside world that would help her to correct her mistaken views of contemporary customs.

Even after Arabella's conditioning through her books has become apparent, the Marquis considers it to be problematic only insofar as it translates into a direct opposition to his wishes. Generally, he does not seem to take his daughter's intellectual development and her opinions very seriously. For example, in the scene when she states her hope that he will not force her to do anything against her will and thus indicates for the first time that she might not want to marry her cousin, the Marquis,

> having had frequent Occasion of admiring his Daughter's Eloquence, did not draw any unpleasing Conclusion from the nice Distinction she made; and, being perfectly assured of her Consent whenever he demanded it, expected the Arrival of his Nephew with great Impatience. (FQ 28)

He is so used to dismissing what his daughter says as ornamental that he gives Glanville his consent before he has even talked to Arabella, which causes further misunderstandings. At no point in the narrative does he have a serious conversation with his daughter in which he tries to find out what she thinks. Despite his general benevolence, the Marquis thus fails to be a wholly convincing authority figure who would base his power on superior experience and understanding and on an unbiased view of his daughter's best interests. Seen as social behaviour,

---

24 Cf. Doody (1989: xx), who sees the Marquis's retreat into solitude as a "fantasy of power born of frustration" of which his wife and later his daughter are the victims. Doody points out that the Marquis is thus characterized as a "slave to imagination", who passes his "stubborn capacity for prolonged and wilful fantasy" on to his daughter (ibid.). While I agree that the novel renders the Marquis an ambivalent character, it has to be said that the Marquis's relation to fantasy and imagination does not feature in the novel beyond the hint given in the first pages.

then, Arabella's romance reading appears as a compensatory strategy for dealing with a deficient social environment.[25]

The issue of the role of reading in shaping expectations about life and the question of how it is embedded in a larger network of social interactions become even more complicated in the novel's representation of Arabella's relationship with Glanville. Most obviously, Arabella's continued rejection of his suit can be read as one of the worst dangers posed by her reading. Glanville is, besides the Countess, one of the few wholly positive characters represented in *The Female Quixote*. There are many signals in the early chapters that Arabella's refusal to marry him is ill-advised; from the beginning, he is represented as a good choice. Arabella herself has to concede that he is attractive, and in conversation he is shown to be good-natured. He falls "passionately in Love" (FQ 30) with her in the course of only a few days, and throughout the rest of the story he is always willing and able to see her character in the most favourable light. Arabella's initial dislike of her cousin, on the other hand, is based on superficial aspects such as his ignorance of the right way to greet her properly.

Unlike the Marquis, Glanville takes Arabella's engagement with her romances seriously and comes to an assessment that is both clear-sighted and generous:

> He found her Usage of him was grounded upon Examples she thought it her Duty to follow; and, strange as her Notions of Life appeared, yet they were supported with so much Wit and Delicacy, that he could not help admiring her, while he foresaw, the Oddity of her Humour would throw innumerable Difficulties in his Way, before he should be able to obtain her. (FQ 45)

He even rescues the books when Arabella's father has decided to destroy them because he has identified them as a source of trouble.[26] Although he also sees the books as a problem, Glanville persuades the Marquis to give up his plan because,

---

25 Patricia L. Hamilton (2011: 121) connects this point to the problem of female education in particular: "If there is a lesson in Arabella's story, it is not that reading romances is inherently dangerous; it is that without opportunities in her formative years for experience, observation, and social interaction, a young woman may be stunted in the development of her judgment, to the detriment of all around her", but I think it can also be regarded as a general commentary on the social dimension of reading.

26 The scene is reminiscent of an episode in chapter 6 of *Don Quijote* where the barber and the priest also decide to burn Quijote's books in order to break their influence on him. What is added here, however, is the element of power imbalance: Arabella's father wants to exert parental authority.

as he says, he "cannot consent to put such an Affront upon my cousin, as to burn her favourite Books" (FQ 56). His behaviour towards Arabella contrasts with that of the Marquis. Glanville's status as the ideal suitor is subsequently affirmed as he learns to interpret her romance vocabulary, involves her in serious conversations, and tries to find out more about her thoughts and feelings.

He even initially agrees when Arabella asks him to read some of her favourite works, in terms that are reminiscent of Johnson's plea for didactic reading:

> to what Studies have you devoted all your Hours, that you could find none to spare for the Perusal of Books from which all useful Knowledge may be drawn; which give us the most shining Examples of Generosity, Courage, Virtue, and Love; which regulate our Actions, form our Manners, and inspire us with a noble Desire of emulating those great, heroic and virtuous Actions, which made those Persons so glorious in their Age, and so worthy of Imitation in ours? (FQ 48)

This episode, entitled "The Adventure of the Books", gets a lot of comic mileage out of the juxtaposition of Arabella's earnest enthusiasm and Glanville's apprehension of having to go through "so many huge Folio's, written, as he conceived, upon the most trifling Subjects imaginable" (FQ 49). What awaits Glanville in this mock-heroic set-up is a task which "to him appeared a Herculean Labour" (ibid.). His ultimate failure to perform Arabella's assignment is, on the one hand, a sign of his superior rationality and judgment.

On the other hand, however, Glanville here passes up the opportunity of fully understanding Arabella's view of the world, which could have opened up a possibility of his helping her to develop a more balanced attitude towards her reading. Reading the romances would have given him an opportunity to fully understand Arabella's way of thinking and thus to discuss her models, norms, and values with her. The two characters who are able to do so later on, the Countess and the doctor, are both familiar with Arabella's books. Glanville's lack of knowledge of the romance also means that he cannot adequately protect Arabella against the manipulations of Sir George. Gardiner (1996: 5) makes a related point when she suggests that Glanville "fails to recognize the romance's educational potentials" and that "his judgment suffers as a result". The problem, however, is not just that Glanville fails to grasp the valuable aspects of the romances' contents. More importantly, he fails to see how Arabella's acts of reading channel her desire for self-improvement, and how they have come to compensate for a lack in her social environment. In the "Adventure of the Books", Glanville is offered an early chance to help the quixotic protagonist to develop her idiosyncratic reading into a socially integrated activity. Especially by introducing the Countess as a positive role model and connoisseur of romances, *The Female Quixote* offers glimpses of a cultural conversation in which romance reading

could be regarded as a harmless and shared source of pleasure. On the whole, however, the novel does not develop the ideal of a well-functioning literary community. This is left to a novel which takes up the quixotic topic a few decades later: Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, which reflects how in the meantime, fictional reading had become an accepted and valued part of social interaction.

Probing Problems of Authority and Instruction

The detailed analyses of characters and plot have shown that while Lennox's novel emphasizes the potential of fictional narrative to supply models and scripts to influence the reader's understanding and evaluation of the social world, it also shows that the actual effects reading may have are hard to control. They depend as much on the reader and her social environment as they do on the kind of text that is read.

For Henry Fielding, in his contemporary review of the novel, it was apparently very clear that *The Female Quixote* was geared towards the instruction of the kind of audience Johnson (1969: 21) described as "young", "ignorant", and in possession of "minds unfurnished with ideas". Fielding approvingly remarks that it "will afford very useful Lessons to all those young Ladies who will peruse it with the proper attention" (Fielding 1970: 194). There are some narrative elements in the novel that appear to project precisely this kind of reading as a hierarchical type of instruction. In particular, the long debate with the doctor at the end of the book (often criticized for sententiousness by later critics), which could be regarded as a mouthpiece for the author, spells out the correct attitudes towards reading for Arabella as well as for a young and naïve audience of *The Female Quixote*. There are also a number of diegetic commentaries which appear to be designed to leave no doubt for the reader how to evaluate Arabella's "follies", in particular at the beginning of the book, where her "unfortunate" (FQ 7) fascination with romances and their effect on her character are explained. The performance of authorship in these comments is fairly unobtrusive: comments overall are brief and the particularly conspicuous gnomic and metadiscursive types are almost completely avoided. It seems that those parts enact a straight-forward type of instruction.

The way in which the plot about Arabella's reading is handled, however, allows some doubt with regard to the question whether the novel is ideally designed to deliver the kind of straight-forward instruction outlined in Johnson's *Rambler* essay. As Ross puts it, "[a] reader seeking wisdom from *The Female Quixote* would often be unsure whether to view Arabella as a model or as a warning" (Ross 1987: 466). The same problem arises, as the previous sections

have shown, with regard to the evaluation of her reading, whether understood as exemplifying the reading of romance in particular or of long narrative fiction in a more general sense.

The complication of a mode that could be called 'simple didactic' is reflected in the long chapter titles, which have been described as "Fieldingesque" (Uddén 2008: 446) because they are reminiscent of the ornate and ironic titles which can be found in *Tom Jones* or *Joseph Andrews*. In contrast to the narratorial commentary in the text itself, the 92 chapter titles in *The Female Quixote* frequently feature metadiscursive commentary and explicit reader address. A few of these titles directly refer to the issue of moral instruction: "V.2, Which inculcates, by a very good Example, that a Person ought not to be too hasty, in deciding a Question he does not perfectly understand", and "II.8, Which concludes with an excellent moral Sentence".

At first sight, these titles may seem to project simple moral instruction as the novel's primary purpose. However, when examined more closely in the context of the chapters' actual content, they can be seen as mocking rather than reinforcing the notion that the story provides useful lessons for its audience. Title V.2 presents a commonplace as if it were a weighty moral insight. The "moral sentence" of II.8, one of very few gnomic commentaries in the novel, similarly turns out to be so universal that it borders on a platitude: "So little capable are poor Mortals of knowing what is best for them!" (FQ 87). More importantly, if read in the context of the content of chapter II.8., the title must be seen as withholding rather than offering a moral perspective on the events that are described: Arabella has invited Sir George, whom she has just met, to her home because she mistakenly thinks that common civility requires this. He speculates on winning her hand, whereas Miss Glanville in turn starts to plot how she might catch him. Arabella's incautious behaviour, Sir George's dubious designs, and Miss Glanville's forward scheming would all be fitting subjects for moralist commentary, but instead the commentary makes fun of the way in which the different motivations on the part of Sir George, Miss Glanville and Arabella thwart each other:

> Happy it was for him [Sir George], that he was prevented by her [Miss Glanville's] Vigilance from attempting a Piece of Gallantry, which would, undoubtedly, have procured him a Banishment from her Presence; but, ignorant, how kind fortune was to him in balking his Designs, he was ungrateful enough to go away in a mighty ill Humour with this fickle Goddess: So little capable are poor Mortals of knowing what is best for them! (FQ 87)

What is announced as a 'moral sentence' turns out to be an ironic comment on Sir George's misjudgement of the situation, and a foreshadowing of the events that are to come, namely Sir George's increasingly devious attempts to win Arabella. The lesson promised by the chapter title thus turns out to be mock instruction,

ridiculing rather than reinforcing the notion that explicit didactic sermonizing is one of the text's main purposes.

Other metadiscursive chapter titles raise the question of the relation between authorial design and readerly reaction: "I.6, In which the Adventure is really concluded, tho' possibly not as the Reader expected", "III.8, By which, we hope, the Reader will be differently affected", or "V.5, In which will be found one of the former Mistakes pursued, and another cleared up, to the great Satisfaction of two Persons, among whom, we expect, the Reader will make a third". These paratexts, it appears, project a particularly clear image of acts of reading by sketching adequate responses to the chapters' content. At the same time, however, it is striking how almost every suggestion for a response is qualified with "possibly", "perhaps", "may", "we expect" and even "in the Author's Opinion". Even if these titles make no secret of the preferred reading, the hedges draw attention to the process rather than the result of emotional or moral response. Authorial control is asserted, but at the same time dramatized as an imposition on the reader and thus partially undermined. On the one hand, reading is projected as being attuned to the emotional and intellectual guidelines of the text, but on the other hand, the reader's freedom to depart from these parameters is highlighted.

The fact that many of the chapter titles have the tendency to complicate rather than spell out the intended effects and purposes of the text raises interesting questions with regard to the function of the title that heads the most controversially discussed chapter in the whole book, the one in which the doctor discusses reading with Arabella and then 'cures' her. The title of the penultimate chapter, "IX.11, Being, in the Author's Opinion, the best Chapter in this History", seems to endorse explicit lecturing in fictional texts. Many commentators have demurred and described this as the worst chapter of the book – some because they would have preferred learning by experience to a sermon (see e.g. Isles [1989: 426]), some because they feel that the doctor's lecture establishes a patriarchal discourse that was questioned in earlier parts of the novel (see e.g. Langbauer [1990: 81]). Anna Uddén (2008) has suggested that this chapter title, like some of the others, should be read as ironic, marking the doctor's diatribe against Arabella's reading as the opinion of a dogmatic character rather than the subject of authorial endorsement. Uddén's perceptive analysis offers an elegant solution to an interpreter who wants to resolve perceived contradictions in the narrative.

However, I think it would be rash to accuse those commentators who have read the ending as a straightforward moral lesson of misinterpretation. In the context of the other chapter titles, the title of IX.2 appears not so much as an ironic attack on the doctor but as an appeal to reflect on the standards for the evaluation of fictional texts. In what sense, one is invited to ask, might this

chapter be called the "best" part of the story? The adjective could convey an aesthetic judgment ('this is the chapter which, in my opinion, embodies my finest work'), or it could refer to a moral evaluation ('this is the chapter which contains the most laudable sentiments'). In line with my earlier findings on Arabella's reading as social isolation, it could also refer to the fact that Arabella has finally found somebody with whom she can discuss her reading (even if he is an opponent of the romances). The metadiscursive chapter titles discussed so far, one might say, project reading as a sophisticated act that involves close and critical examination (starting with an analysis of the relation between title and text). If this pattern is applied to chapter IX.2, the title reads like an invitation to consider one's own expectations and to speculate about the novel's design.

Another important issue negotiated in the chapter titles is the relation between the kind of writing Arabella loves and the kind of writing Lennox herself has produced in *The Female Quixote*. This pertains, for example, to the title of chapter II.10, "In which our Heroine is engaged in a very perilous Adventure" (FQ 92). The title reproduces Arabella's expectation that her life should be a series of exciting and romantic events. Such parodic titles, it might seem, clearly serve to emphasize *The Female Quixote*'s difference from romance writing.[27] However, as Richetti (1999: 208) notes, Arabella in a sense really does turn herself into a romance heroine. The title of chapter II.10 can be read both as an ironic reference to the romance pattern *and* an adequate description of the chapter contents: because of her romantic disposition, the protagonist really brings herself into a dangerous situation. Reading, then, is again projected as a complex operation that calls for a comparison between *The Female Quixote* and a typical romance narrative. The chapter titles foreground both contrasts and similarities.

In an article on Lennox's contemporary Sarah Fielding, Emily Friedman (2011: 182–183) argues that Fielding "aim[ed] at a wide variety of readers, modeling and seeking a diverse community whom she addressed with growing directness across her work in the 1750s". *The Female Quixote*, in my view, was involved in a similar endeavour. The novel can be read as an offer to a naïve, inexperienced reader, who may ignore the irony of the chapter titles but at the same time hone her critical capacities by comparing her own reading to that of Arabella. However, it also appeals to a sophisticated, educated audience that will appreciate the ambiguities and read the chapter titles as a running commentary on the purpose and effect of the novel. *The Female Quixote* is programmatic in demonstrating that

---

27 Cf. Ross (1987: 456), who states more generally: "[n]ever did a novel so loudly proclaim its own realism in direct opposition to the romance, which Lennox' narrator seems unequivocally to condemn."

the rising genre of the novel can be used for such flexible address, that it should offer moral instruction but also reflect on the complications of such instruction.

The employment of intertextuality in the novel has a similar effect: the different explicit intertextual references can also be seen as projecting different levels of sophistication in the act of reading.[28] The large majority of explicit intertextual references are to the romances Arabella reads – either to specific individual works, such as Madeleine de Scudéry's *Artamène, ou le grand Cyrus* and *Clélie*, or to the genre as a whole. They feature prominently on the level of the story, referring to physical objects – books – that have been or are being perused, to stories the fictional reader thinks about, or to works that are the subject of conversation between the characters. This type of intertextual reference at first sight does not make any great demands on the literary knowledge of the recipient. The French romances are explicitly characterized as an inferior type of text at the beginning of the novel, and their main characteristics are spelled out in the descriptions of Arabella's reactions to the world around her. One only needs to have a vague idea of French romances to understand how they are ridiculed. When it is said about Arabella, for example, that "her Thoughts to use Scudery's Phrase, were at cruel War with each other" (FQ 180), the reference to the French writer signals a contrast between Lennox's own writing and the phrase that is used, which is thus marked as clichéd.

However, those references to the romances that are built into the structure of *The Female Quixote*, such as the implicit and extradiegetic instances of intertextuality in the chapter titles, can also be seen as projecting more sophisticated reading stances, as the above discussion has shown. They appeal to a more playful type of reading which understands the parody to be not just ridiculing the text, but also laying bare some of the precepts on which *The Female Quixote* itself is based.

The intertextual relation to Cervantes's *Don Quijote* is just as central to Lennox's novel, even though it is by comparison developed in far less explicit detail. Even an uninformed reader will have little difficulty in discerning that *Don Quijote* is an important pre-text, but references such as that of the "Adventure of

---

28 The term 'intertextuality' is used in a narrow sense here, i.e. pertaining to references to pre-texts that are foregrounded by the author (see Broich/Pfister 1985: 31), in contrast to the notion that all texts are related to each other and thus always already intertextual. As Pfister (Broich/Pfister 1985: 25–30) explains, intertextual references can be explicit or implicit and have varying degrees of intensity. I have found Broich/Pfister's 1985 study particularly helpful in distinguishing different kinds of intertextual references – as far as I can see it still has not been surpassed in offering categories that are adaptable to narrative theory (for a fairly recent favourable appraisal of Broich/Pfister's contribution to intertextuality studies, cf. also Orr 2003: 9–10).

the Books" to the book-burning scene in Cervantes's novel will be below the radar for those who have not read it. By foregrounding *Don Quijote* as a central pre-text, Lennox explicitly places her work in a respected European tradition of writing. This association projects the reading of fiction as a culturally elevated activity – to a small extent insofar as it presupposes an audience that at least understands the reference, to a larger one insofar as it also addresses a more informed audience that can look for concrete similarities and differences (as Henry Fielding did in his review).

References to contemporary authors and texts, finally, are less immediately visible in the novel. The most obvious reference of this kind is the already cited comment by the doctor about the excellent fiction written by "[a]n admirable Writer of our own time" (FQ 377), whom the informed reader can identify as Samuel Richardson. Seen through the lens of projecting reading stances, this reference appears as a first step towards a very interesting strategy: the use of intradiegetic references to works that played a role in the current literary scene in order to create the sense of a social world in which narrative fiction has an established, even central place. Like the intradiegetic references to Arabella's romances, this detail generates a reality effect in the sense of Roland Barthes, suggesting the verisimilitude of Arabella's and the doctor's world. It also asserts that narrative fiction has become a shared point of reference for conversation – shared not by Arabella, who is not familiar with fiction beyond her romances, but by the more literary circles in which the doctor presumably moves, and shared also by the reader who can translate the allusion. Such a use of intertextuality, as the next chapter will show, becomes a hallmark of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, written a few decades later, where it is used both to assert and reflect the establishment of the novel as a genre.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

At a time in which the "elevation" of the novel (Warner 1998) is in full swing and in which, as Christina Lupton sums it up, authors are taking a step back to consider "their own industry and the materiality of the novel" (2011: 290),[29] *The Female Quixote* offers a self-reflexive stock-taking of the purposes, problems, and status of reading fiction as a cultural practice. Firstly, Lennox's novel rewrites *Don Quijote* as an exploration of contemporary anxieties about reading as an

---

29 Lupton, building on work by Thomas Keymer and Janine Barchas, describes the 1750s as a time in which authors reacted to the successes of Fielding and Richardson by experimenting with the possibilities offered by the medial format of the novel.

embodied act. These anxieties are transcribed in such a way that the work contributes to the formation of a discourse in which novel reading is primarily defined by its (purported) cognitive effects. Secondly, two aspects of reading as a cognitive act are explored in depth: the notion that fictional reading should offer moral instruction, and the idea that it stimulates processes of rational thought which are applicable to the real world. Arabella's reading exemplifies the promise as well as the problems of both approaches. She is a model of an ideal moral reader who is willing to apply lessons from her reading to her own life; at the same time, she is a cautionary example for a concept of instruction that is too one-dimensional. Wolfgang G. Müller has described the novel's special interest in its protagonist's subjectivity as a milestone in the history of the English novel; by closely rendering Arabella's idiosyncratic mind style, he argues, Lennox makes an important contribution to a type of narration that is particularly interested in psychological processes (1979: 388–9). It is this interest in psychological processes that also serves to complicate the representation of reading as an act: the novel gives insights into the mind of the reader at work and thereby vividly illustrates how readers take control at the same time as they are being influenced. Thirdly, moreover, ideas about the cognitive impact of reading are complicated by the novel's emphasis on the large extent to which reading is a socially embedded practice: *The Female Quixote* stages the effects of the protagonist's reading as dependent not only on the content of the works she reads and on her own character but also on her interaction with the people who surround her.

Charlotte Lennox's bold move of transposing the gender of one of the most prominent fictional figures in European literary history did not result in a caricature of the silly woman reader but a complex (and, against Johnson's warning, mixed) character in her own right. Like Cervantes's pre-text, in which, as Richetti (1996b: 4) sums it up, "ridicule of Don Quixote modulates into admiration for his visionary consistency and even nobility in preferring the idealized and honorable world of chivalry to the brutal realities of sixteenth-century Spain", *The Female Quixote* also oscillates between ridicule and admiration of the quixotic hero. This ambivalence lies at the centre of the novel's complex attitude towards reading. My analysis of how the text reflects and itself narratively reshapes central debates on reading is, among other things, meant as a contribution to the current reassessment of Lennox's role as a driving force for and chronicler of the 'rise of the novel'.

By bringing the female quixote as "a new figure to the attention of the English reading public" (Pawl 2009: 166), Lennox's novel inaugurates a trend of using the female reader as a representative for an exploration of the anxieties and hopes attached to literary reading. George Colman's play *Polly Honeycombe* (1760), for example, is centred on a heroine who is an obsessive reader of novels and resists

her father's marriage plans because of her reading. It is not until the end of the eighteenth century, however, when the novel as a genre has made its way further into the cultural mainstream, that quixotic readers have their heyday in English literature. They feature as novel readers, as in Maria Edgeworth's novella "Angelina" (1801) and Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine or, Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader* (1813), or as readers of other types of literature, as in Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* (1804), in which the eponymous protagonist is led astray by her reading of philosophical texts which she only half understands, or in Hannah More's short tract "The History of Mr. Fantom, (The New Fashioned Philosopher,) and his Man William" (1801), which warns against the morally detrimental effects of reading radical philosophy. The motif of the quixotic reader thus becomes an established way of exploring fears about the detrimental effect of new ideas, and at the same time of gauging the impact of the growing print market. The work that most elaborately employs the quixotic plot in order to explore the specific cultural status of novel reading at the turn of the centuries as a practice in its cognitive, social, and institutional aspects is Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*.

Chapter 4
The Institutionalization of Novel Reading: Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*

In a survey of literary change in Britain over the course of the eighteenth century, Clifford Siskin argues that the quantitative rise in the production of printed matter between 1740 and 1780 resulted in a qualitative shift, "Britain's transformation into a print culture". This encompassed the formation of "literature" as an institution, including the "commodification into 'high' and 'low' forms" as well as "the notion of a 'national tradition', the apotheosis of key genres and the professional and academic enterprise of 'criticism'" (Siskin 2005: 822).

Northanger Abbey, written shortly after this transformative period,[1] reflects the new status of literature and participates in the complex process of the institutionalization of literature and the novel in particular. As in *The Female Quixote*, parodistic elements are used to explore the conventions of fictional texts and their potential impact on readers. To a much higher degree than Lennox's novel, however, *Northanger Abbey* envisions fictional literature as a differentiated contemporary phenomenon with specific authors, titles, and genres. Moreover, it highlights the significance accorded to the reading of fiction as a part of social life.

The interest in literature as a socially and historically differentiated phenomenon is foregrounded in the paratext. In her introduction to the first edition of *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen comments on the fairly long time that had elapsed between the work's creation and its publication:

> Some observation is necessary upon those parts of the work which thirteen years have made comparatively obsolete. The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes. (NA 13)[2]

Critics have seen this insistence on the specific historical context as indicating the necessity of treating Austen's work as "demanding serious historical analysis" (Johnson/Tuite 2009b: 3) – an assertion directed against the (by now mostly

---

1 Although *Northanger Abbey* was published posthumously, in December 1817 (the title page gives 1818 as the year of publication), it was written in the late 1790s, with – as most Austen scholars believe – only small changes made after 1803 (cf. Butler 1995: xi–xv).
2 "Advertisement, by the Authoress, to *Northanger Abbey*", written for the first published edition of *Northanger Abbey*. An analysis of possible reasons why the publishing house Crosby and Co., which accepted the book (then with the original title *Susan*) in 1803, did not publish it until 1817/18, is undertaken by Mandal (2007b: 62–74).

obsolete) tendency to regard Austen's books as escapist miniatures of private aspects of life. What has to my knowledge gone unnoticed, however, is the significance of the special mention of "books" together with "places, manners, and opinions". This detail reflects the new cultural status of literature, which resonates in the extensive treatment of books and reading in both the novel's story and discourse. More specifically, I see it as representative of Austen's particular interest in reading as social behaviour and as an institutionalized practice: books do not figure as timeless classics, or in generalized functions, but as artefacts with highly specific connotations and social significance. The placing of the word 'books' between 'manners' and 'opinions' suggests a connection between reading as a cognitive process (by directing attention to the way in which specific contents of books may influence people's views – or in turn mirror them) and reading as a social and institutionalized practice.

This theme is further developed in the plot. For the characters in *Northanger Abbey*, reading is an established component of daily routine. While an interest in and an exchange about books feature in all of Austen's novels,[3] *Northanger Abbey* occupies a special place in her œuvre. With its quixotic plot, it offers the most sustained and complex commentary on the contemporary status of reading.

My analysis of *Northanger Abbey* is informed by a recent tendency in Austen scholarship to re-evaluate the relation of her works to the literary landscape of her day. In older accounts of her fiction, Austen's indebtedness to a broad range of authors, some of whom can be labelled as 'popular', was acknowledged only reluctantly. Frank W. Bradbrook, for example, one of the earliest scholars to examine such relations in depth in *Jane Austen and her Predecessors* (1966), gives the impression that he finds Austen's well-documented copious reading of female (i.e. 'minor') authors somewhat embarrassing. Such evaluations were called into question by scholars with feminist leanings, who have shown a more balanced appreciation of the various ways in which the work of other female authors, particularly Ann Radcliffe, Maria Edgeworth, Frances Burney, and Charlotte Smith, has exerted a significant influence on Austen's writing.[4] At the same time,

---

3 Protagonists such as Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor Dashwood, and Anne Elliot all enjoy reading (see e.g. the exchange between Elizabeth, Darcy, and Miss Bingley on books [*Pride and Prejudice*, ch. 11] or the one between Anne and Captain Benwick on the sobering benefits of prose as compared to poetry [*Persuasion*, ch. 12]). Unbalanced preferences with regard to reading also signal an imbalance in character – see e.g. the pedantic Mary Bennet, who only likes to read sermons, Lydia and Kitty Bennet's impatience about listening to anything other than the reading of novels, or Marianne Dashwood's strong preference for romantic poetry. For explorations of reading as a theme in these other works, see e.g. Bonaparte (2005), Newey (1995) and Pikoulis (2005).

4 See e.g. Butler (1995: xxii–xxxi) and Spencer (2009).

however, feminist criticism of Austen has shown a tendency to regard remarkable features of her novels as departures from earlier 'inferior' practices. *Northanger Abbey*, consequently, was for a long time understood mainly as a text that records Austen's disapproval of and superiority to much of the fiction produced in her time (see Waldron 1999: 26–36). By contrast, Anthony Mandal's *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel* (2007b) represents a more integrative approach. Mandal regards Austen not as a stand-alone original genius but as an author whose success depended on her ability to synthesize successful patterns: "Jane Austen perhaps retains her canonical place to this day because, of all the female novelists of her time who have since fallen by the wayside, she was as much an accomplished reader as she was a determined author" (Mandal 2007b: 216). Mandal's re-evaluation – developed mainly in order to describe the relation of Austen's later work to the literary context of the 1810s – has given important impulses for my own assessment of the ways in which her first novel responds to, takes up, and modifies earlier literary developments.

There is a second long-standing tendency in Austen scholarship that I am going to resist: that of seeing her œuvre in terms of a rise in quality from the early work to 'mature' novels like *Emma*. This view makes it seem natural to dismiss the marked differences between *Northanger Abbey* and Austen's later texts by characterizing the early novel as less complex (see Emsley 2005: 12).[5] Austen criticism has at times tended to reduce the plot of *Northanger Abbey* to a parody of Gothic fiction, and to regard this parody as a rather simplistic matter. A typical example is Bradbrook's verdict that Austen (like Lennox before her) uses burlesque to "ridicule the false taste and behaviour caused by reading romances and melodramatic literature" (Bradbrook 1966: 90). Lennox's influence is here acknowledged only to be represented in a negative light:[6] the 'burlesque' mode is characterized as a crude literary technique which Austen, credited with "greater sensitivity and control" than her predecessor, used more sparingly and would later "outgrow" (ibid.: 93). In a similar vein, in his more recent study on *Jane Austen's Narrative Techniques*, Massimiliano Morini describes *Northanger Abbey* as relying on "simple mechanisms" (2009: 37) and as dominated by a plot which "uses the pseudo-

---

5 Cf. also Fergus (1983: 7), who – in a similar vein as Bradbrook – sees the novel mainly as comic (as opposed to didactic), as playing a "joke on the relation between literature and life", and thus concurs with a long-standing critical agreement that this is Austen's "weakest" novel (cf. ibid.: 13).

6 Austen herself read *The Female Quixote* more than once, as a letter to her sister Cassandra from the year 1807 shows: "[W]e changed it [Madame de Genlis's *Alphonsine*] for the 'Female Quixote', which now makes our evening amusement; to me a very high one, as I find the work quite equal to what I remembered it" (quoted after Bradbrook 1966: 90).

gothic story of Catherine Morland as a parodic foil for the absurdities of gothic fiction" (ibid.: 38).

Morini's evaluation of the novel as "simple" makes sense in a particular context: a critical tradition which regards Austen as a key developer of subtle explorations of character. For critics mainly interested in the development of character psychology, *Northanger Abbey* with its parodistic mode does not have as much to offer as *Emma* or *Persuasion*. The multidimensional and sophisticated ways in which parody is employed in *Northanger Abbey* become apparent, however, once one reads the text as exploring the status of contemporary literature and the functions and purposes of reading.[7]

In my disentangling of the different layers of reflection on facets of reading in *Northanger Abbey*, I focus first on the specific patterns of the quixotic plot and thereby re-examine interpretations of Austen's work as a parody. The following sections will explore more specifically how *Northanger Abbey* responds to two contexts that loomed large in contemporary discussions about the dangers and benefits of reading fiction. One is the issue of fiction's possible didactic impact that was also central in Lennox; the other is the hold over the reader's emotions that was so closely linked to the rise and fall of the subgenre of the sentimental novel. The final two sections, then, engage with the question of how Austen embeds these concerns with the cognitive and emotional effects of specific kinds of reading into an exploration of the social and institutional contexts governing contemporary perceptions of the novel.

The Uses of Parody: Restructuring the Quixotic Plot

The quixotic plot of *Northanger Abbey* centres on Catherine Morland, a naïve young woman who has grown up in the country, and who in the course of the

---

7 Susan Lanser, in *Fictions of Authority* (1992), puts a feminist spin on this argument: as she sees it, Austen's first work displays a self-assured voice that was dialled down in her later work in favour of a more reticent voice characterized by features such as "free indirect discourse, irony, ellipsis, negation, euphemism, ambiguity" (1992: 62) – features that were deemed more appropriate for a female author. I agree that the authorial narrative voice in *Northanger Abbey* needs to be taken seriously as a self-reflexive strategy. I am not so sure about the evaluation of the later 'reticence' as less self-assured. The less explicit performance of authorship in texts like *Pride and Prejudice* or *Persuasion*, in my view, can also be seen as an indication that in these works, Austen no longer deemed it necessary to deal explicitly with the purposes and effects of fictional writing.

novel becomes entranced with Gothic novels. During her first journey away from home, on a visit to Bath, Catherine falls in love with Henry Tilney and is invited to visit his family at Northanger Abbey. Inspired by the descriptions of the Gothic castle in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Catherine expects the Abbey to be a place of mystery and adventure. She goes so far as to imagine that Henry's father, General Tilney, is a scheming Gothic villain who has incarcerated or even killed his wife. The scenes in which Catherine explores items of furniture and remote parts of the building, trembling with the anticipation of uncovering secret plots, are among the comic highlights of the novel.

References both to the Gothic in particular and to romance literature in a more general sense are used in two different ways in *Northanger Abbey*: on the one hand, they function as negatively evaluated foils for the kind of pitfalls fiction should avoid, or at least the ways in which it needs to be modified. This is similar to the 'novel vs. romance' juxtaposition which is so central to *The Female Quixote* and which reappears here in an updated version. On the other hand, however, positive evaluations of the Gothic and the romance as important milestones of a novelistic tradition are also evoked in *Northanger Abbey*. The quixotic plot is used to negotiate these contradictory positions.

Austen's novel differs from Lennox's in its clear understanding that, to go back to John Richetti's formula, "at the end of the [eighteenth] century something called the novel very clearly exists in the minds of readers and writers" (1996b: 2). In *Northanger Abbey*, the novel is positioned as a distinct genre which, although fairly new, already boasts a tradition. This historical dimension is used to stake a claim for the genre. One way of doing so is through the parodistic engagement with fictional subgenres, which can be divided into three stages: first, the implicit confrontation of the romance as a broad generic phenomenon in the first chapter; second, the explicit evaluations (both by other characters and by the narrator) of Catherine's Gothic novel reading, and third, the sections at Northanger Abbey in which Catherine herself actually 'becomes' a Gothic heroine.

The first chapter highlights a pattern that was already evident in *The Female Quixote*: it suggests a contrast between the novel *Northanger Abbey* and a kind of narrative fiction that is roughly congruent with Congreve's formulation of 'romance' as it was outlined in the previous chapter. The first sentence immediately asserts a logic of juxtaposition: "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (NA 15). What then follows is a catalogue of conventions from a romance repertoire – and the ways in which these fail to describe the more prosaic contemporary world of the protagonist. Catherine does not fulfil the requirements of the romance formula: she is neither particularly beautiful nor accomplished, she comes from a loving but

commonplace family (rather than growing up unprotected by her parents), and she has never "inspired any real passion" in a man (NA 18).

Whereas Lennox shows how her heroine's development is governed by a set of romance-induced expectations, however, Austen does not present Catherine as so immediately influenced by her reading. It is true that there are hints that Catherine comes under the sway of books in her adolescence, when "[f]rom fifteen to seventeen she was in training for a heroine; she read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives" (NA 17). The miscellany of these quotations from writers like Pope, Gray, and Shakespeare, however, appears rather haphazard; they do not add up to a code of conduct or view of the world.[8] Moreover, in subsequent chapters Catherine comes across as a remarkably level-headed, if naïve, person who seems to entertain no unreasonable notions or hopes that could have been instilled by her books. The effect of literary reading, then, is not represented in a cause-and-effect model, like the one that came under close scrutiny in Lennox's novel, but as a more intangible phenomenon. What is mainly foregrounded by the juxtaposition of romantic ideal and prosaic 'reality' is the expectation a reader (i.e. readers in general, not Catherine in particular) brings to *fiction*, not to the real world.

These expectations – in the context of which 'fiction' equals 'romantic fiction' – are ridiculed by being inserted into a non-romantic context: for example, Catherine's mother "instead of dying in bringing [Catherine] into the world, as anybody might expect, [...] still lived on", and little Catherine herself "greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush" (NA 16). The interesting point here is not just the rejection of romance clichés in favour of a more realistic representation of character, but also the way in which this rejection itself is highlighted (instead of just silently performed). The text thus puts forward a claim to its own originality: insofar as Catherine is, precisely *because* she is so ordinary, "unaccountable" and "strange" for a fictional character (NA 18), the fictional text that represents this ordinariness must be extraordinary.

The beginning of *Northanger Abbey* thus characterizes the novel's own model of representation not only as a more adequate way of representing the world but also as a fresh and unconventional way of writing. The fact that Austen's novel is

---

8 As Margaret Anne Doody points out, this baffling "pile-up of quotations from other books" suggests Catherine's lack of analytical insight into her reading – she only learns by heart and repeats (2009: 168).

only the latest in a line of works trying for believable plots and characters as well as contemporary settings is omitted here.[9] This omission leaves open whether the reader is supposed to focus on the contrast between this particular work and a tradition of clichéd romance, or to regard *Northanger Abbey* as representative of the newly established genre of the novel and its tendencies in general. One might also say: the first chapter of *Northanger Abbey* is a manifesto of the novel genre's project of continuous self-invention.

In this playful self-promotion of a specific novel, and the novel genre in general, the romance conventions themselves are re-claimed as a useful part of the literary heritage at the same moment in which they are ridiculed. In ironically evoking readerly disappointment with the deficiencies of the heroine of *Northanger Abbey*, the text also implicitly poses the question of what audiences find attractive about fictional texts. Clearly, the kind of reader who insists on reading about rose-bushes and dormice is derided here. At the same time, however, the emphasis on reader expectations in the first two chapters also suggests the question of whether the faithful depiction of a well-known contemporary reality in itself already makes a novel worthwhile. Does not the audience also always look for the entertainment and excitement the romance formula was designed to deliver?

The beginning of *Northanger Abbey* acknowledges the desire for entertainment as a main reason for fictional reading, and not only to poke fun at it (by suggesting that ordinary Catherine must be a disappointment for an audience expecting it) but also to endorse it as a valid motivation that should be taken into account. The parody of the romance conventions in *Northanger Abbey* entails not just a foregrounding and a critical evaluation of the romance model but on another level also demonstrates the attractions of this model. After all, the first sentence "No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (NA 15) is itself ambiguous: it can be read in terms of the contrast that has been examined above, but it can also be taken to announce that despite inauspicious beginnings, Catherine does in fact turn out to be a heroine of sorts. The playful announcement later on in the same chapter takes up this notion: "When a young lady is to be a heroine, the perverseness of forty surrounding families cannot prevent her. Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way" (NA 18). What 'happens', of course, is that the author in the end *does* cater to audience expectations and at least in a rudimen-

---

9 Most English novels of the eighteenth century (with the notable exception of the Gothic novel) can be regarded as participating in this endeavour. Examples that are referred to in *Northanger Abbey* itself at later points include Frances Burney's *Camilla*, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, and Samuel Richardson's *Charles Grandison*.

tary way follows the same script as the romance model. Catherine may neither be extraordinarily beautiful nor accomplished, but she *does* effortlessly attract the best young man the novel has to offer. Her journey may not take her to the Alps and to a mysterious castle, but Bath and the Abbey offer strangeness and mysteries on a scale of their own. On the final pages, the happy ending is even explicitly described as dictated by the conventions of romance fiction: "The anxiety, which in this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine [...] can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity" (NA 233).

In short, *Northanger Abbey* is to some degree itself a modified version of a romance: it delivers, as Marilyn Butler puts it, "the classic, universally condoned reward of romance for the romantic" (1995: xlvii). Like Austen's other novels, it performs an update of a basic romance convention: Cinderella acquires a country estate –[10] or at least, as Butler points out (ibid.), a comfortable parsonage with apple trees. What distinguishes *Northanger Abbey* from Austen's later works is that it explicitly foregrounds how its own narrative strategies share some of the basic conventions that inform the romance novel.

The ambivalent evaluation of romance conventions continues in later parts of the novel. It can be traced in the representation of Catherine's own reading in those chapters in which she features as a reader of fiction herself. Like Arabella, Catherine is entranced by a particular fictional subgenre: in her case it is the Gothic novel, which she encounters when she accompanies her wealthy neighbours to fashionable Bath and becomes friends with another young woman, Isabella Thorpe. Isabella is one of the least sympathetic characters in the whole novel, and this immediately casts a dubious light on her favourite reading material. The Gothic novel seems like a perfect instantiation of those aspects of the romance that were represented as clichéd in the first chapter: it features outlandish plots set in far-away places, and the conversation Catherine and Isabella have about their reading is ironically described as "a specimen of their very warm attachment, and of the delicacy, discretion, originality of thought, and literary taste which marked the reasonableness of that attachment" (NA 38).

In particular, Isabella and Catherine discuss Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and this may suggest that Austen uses the quixotic plot centring on Catherine to disparage one of the most popular fellow novelists of her time.[11]

---

10 For this formula, I am indebted to Paul Goetsch and a seminar entitled "Love and Marriage in the English Novel", which he taught at the University of Freiburg.

11 See e.g. Robert Miles (1993: 145), who thinks that the novel "warns against the dangers of Gothic reading".

However, while Radcliffe's work is implicitly criticized through the association with Isabella, it also has a creditable champion in the character of the excellent Henry Tilney, who proclaims that he has "read all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and most of them with great pleasure" (NA 102). He also professes that he could not put down *Udolpho* for two days, "my hair standing on end the whole time" (NA 103) – a reading stance that is in this context presented as unproblematic, evoking the entertainment factor of reading as a legitimate and important purpose. The explicit statements about Radcliffe in these passages, then, express a profound respect for the literary achievements of one of the most successful and popular writers around the turn of the century.[12] In the first part of *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine's enthusiasm for the Gothic novel is thus at least partly vindicated, and it even serves to strengthen the desirable bond with Tilney and his sister.

In the second part of the novel, the one set in General Tilney's Northanger Abbey, however, Catherine's Gothic reading is represented as more problematic. Here, Catherine does start to look for Gothic adventures in the real world. Inspired by her ideas of the Abbey as a second castle of Udolpho, Catherine expects to find a mysterious message in her wardrobe, and – in the climax of the quixotic plot – secretly inspects the rooms of General Tilney's deceased wife, prepared to find some kind of Bluebeard chamber:

> Catherine found herself alone in the gallery before the clocks had ceased to strike. It was no time for thought; she hurried on, slipped with the least possible noise through the folding doors, and without stopping to look or breathe, rushed forward to the one in question. The lock yielded to her hand, and, luckily, with no sullen sound that could alarm a human being. On tip-toe she entered; the room was before her; but it was some minutes before she could advance another step. She beheld what fixed her to the spot and agitated every feature. – She saw a large, well-proportioned apartment, an handsome dimity bed, arranged as unoccupied with an housemaid's care, a bright Bath stove, mahogany wardrobes and neatly-painted chairs, on which the warm beams of a western sun gaily poured through two sash windows! Catherine had expected to have her feelings worked, and worked they were. Astonishment and doubt first seized them; and a shortly succeeding ray of common sense added some bitter emotions of shame. (NA 182)

This passage has often been cited as the central instance of *Northanger Abbey*'s parodying Radcliffe, and indeed it closely resembles the Gothic novel's rendering of a character's anxious and endangered state through his or her movements in space. As in the parallel scene in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the perspective of the

---

12 See Butler (1995: xxviii), who contends that Radcliffe's writing was regarded as having "opened up a profoundly imaginative, intellectually ambitious fictional genre" by Austen as well as other contemporary authors.

narrative here stays very close to the perceptions and anticipations of the heroine. The first part – up until the dash – in this way builds up suspense, up to the point where Catherine crosses the threshold of the chamber. At the turning point, Austen employs a signature 'Gothic' move (also familiar to today's audience of thriller and horror movies) by rendering the character's horrified reaction *before* giving away information about the sight that has triggered it. By juxtaposing this build-up with the description of the cheerfully ordinary room that presents itself to the heroine, then, the passage ridicules both the Gothic novel for its theatrical devices and outlandish plots, and its heroine for being taken in by them.

But this is not all the passage does. If one looks more closely, one can also find some elements that complicate the characterization of Catherine as a misled reader. First of all, there is the way in which the narrative structure serves to project reading as becoming involved in the scene. For a moment, this passage invites us to be uncertain whether the outcome might not be a Bluebeard or Montoni story after all, the kind of novel in which Catherine actually would make a gruesome discovery. It thus projects reading as experiencing a thrill not unlike the one that Catherine anticipates – performing, as it were, the pleasures of reading for sensation. At the same time, the passage suggests that Catherine's reading-induced folly is not very deeply engrained: the moment she realizes that what she sees before her does not match what she has envisaged, her "common sense" returns. The passage does end in a dramatic climax. However, it is not the discovery of a horrific secret but a moment of self-discovery, when Catherine understands that she has behaved foolishly and, what is worse, improperly (by snooping around). In giving serious consideration to Catherine's emotions rather than pontificating on the misguidedness of her expectations, the narrative foregrounds the psychological complexity of her act of 'misreading' Northanger Abbey.[13]

The engagement with the Gothic novel in this passage, then, turns out to be multidimensional – while the Gothic plot formula is represented as inadequate for capturing the events at the Abbey, some of its techniques for the representation of interiority and emotional involvement of the reader are not simply rejected but taken up in modified shape. If *Northanger Abbey* puts forward a position on a

---

13 Joe Bray comes to a similar conclusion in his reading of *Northanger Abbey*, in which he examines how the text handles the issue of Catherine's immersion in textual worlds (Bray 2009: 147–156). As Bray points out, Catherine is represented as "able to reflect dispassionately on her involvement in text worlds, even as she is most involved in them" (ibid.: 150). In the passage cited above, the reference to Catherine's expectations about "having her feelings worked", I would argue, supports Bray's argument that she does not completely identify with the Gothic heroine but is on some level always aware of the difference between fiction and reality.

desirable form and content of fictional texts, then, it is not a clear juxtaposition of the (good, realistic) realist novel and the (bad, fantastic) Gothic novel or romance. As the comparison between Catherine's short-term silliness and Arabella's protracted delusions shows, Austen's text deemphasizes the direct impact of specific contents on the reader's ideas about life. The protagonist's ability to read the world around herself – for example, to see through schemes like Isabella's –, which is poorly developed in the early parts of the novel, matures parallel to her competence in reading fiction and assigning it its proper place. As I will argue later on in this chapter, what has the largest impact in *Northanger Abbey* is not the actual content of fiction but the role books play in social networks. Nonetheless, the novel also revisits central debates about the particular purposes and effects of fiction.

Catherine Morland and the Politics of the Didactic

I have argued that *Northanger Abbey* reflects an even more sceptical stance on the direct impact of fictional models on the reader's ideas and behaviour than *The Female Quixote* does, and that this difference can be traced in the modifications Austen performs on the quixotic plot. In particular, the text addresses one aspect of reading as a cognitive process that is also a central concern in Lennox's text: the question of whether, and how, fiction should aim to educate its readers.

Some scholars have taken issue with *Northanger Abbey* for what they see as its "didactic woodenness", "a pompous essayistic tone perhaps intended for the reader's as well as for the hearer's instruction", i.e. directed not only at the young protagonist but also at the text's actual reader (Morini 2009: 103; 102). This assessment is provoked both by Henry Tilney's lectures to Catherine and the relatively large number of narratorial commentaries, which distinguish *Northanger Abbey* from Austen's later works. The critical consensus in the twentieth century has mainly been to prefer the style of these later works and to praise Austen for her growing reticence to employ explicit commentary – following the assessment of Austen's contemporary Richard Whately. He appreciatively noted in a review (written in 1821) of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* that

> [t]he moral lessons [...] of this lady's novels, though clearly and impressively conveyed, are not offensively put forward, but spring incidentally from the circumstances of the story; they are not forced upon the reader, but he is left to collect them (though without any difficulty) for himself [...]. (Whately 1998: 325)

In a similar vein, Gilbert Ryle has famously praised Austen for being a "moralist" instead of a "moraliser" (Ryle 1971: 286).

The idea that "moralising" – the use of statements that are 'didactic' in the sense that they explicitly *spell out* a lesson the reader is supposed to take from the text –[14] is a problem for fiction already plays a role in the earlier eighteenth century. The discussion of Lennox's novel in the previous chapter has shown how, on the one hand, the idea of readers as "automatons" that can be pro-grammed by fiction (Warner 1998: 5) was taken seriously and considered in terms of the responsibility it conferred onto the writer. On the other hand, both practical and ethical limits of the capacity of fiction to convey clear lessons were consid-ered. By the time Whately wrote his review, the tide seems to have turned against didacticism, whose "offensive" character to him is obvious. One reason for this hostility is suggested by Anthony Mandal, who points out that in the meantime, a popular subgenre had emerged that was dedicated to imparting explicit lessons: the moral-domestic novel, in which "the Evangelical discourse moved surely but briefly into the fictional mainstream of the early nineteenth century" (Mandal 2007b: 130). Examples of such fiction include Hannah More's *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* (1809) and Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1811).[15] The association of didactic fiction with Evangelicalism – and with a kind of fiction directed mainly at women and children – may have contributed to its reputation as old-fashioned and unpleasantly zealous.

Northanger Abbey, I contend in this section, reflects the same conviction about the purposes of good fiction that informs Whately's review: that it should teach, but in a 'subtle' rather than a 'sermonizing' way. If there is one idea about the purposes of the novel that is clearly ridiculed in this work, it is the view that fiction should work like a sermon or conduct book. What some critics have seen as an annoying didactic tendency in the work is better described as an engagement with the problems of didacticism itself. The performance of authorship in the commentaries, once again, cannot be equated to a straight-forward prescription of values and opinions. This also means that Whately's idea that moral lessons can be culled from the text "without any difficulty" misses the mark. In the following, I will first examine Henry Tilney's attempts to 'teach' Catherine and explore to what extent they can be connected to the 'teachings' by fictional texts. Then I will look at the treatment of the issue of didactics in the narrator's commentary and consider the question of how *what* is being said or implied about this subject relates to the narrative technique employed in *Northanger Abbey* itself.

---

14 Jan Fergus does make a case for Austen as a "primarily didactic" writer in *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* (1983), but this case rests on a definition of "didactic" as "instructive" in a broader sense than the more narrow definition I am concerned with here (see Fergus 1983: 3).

15 In his chapter on "Making the Popular Polite" (2007b: 91–130), Mandal discusses the interrela-tions between this fictional subgenre and Austen's later novel *Mansfield Park* (1814).

Henry's speeches to Catherine can indeed be connected to the stance the novel displays towards its own readership. However, to suggest that this means a projection of reading as being instructed, as taking a lesson together with Catherine, would be an oversimplification. Henry's comments cannot in all respects be taken at face value. In particular, a scene where he talks at length about fiction and other matters – the outing to Beechen Cliff – shows that there are factors which complicate his authority and thereby raise questions about the didactic mode in general. These complications come into view especially clearly if one compares the dialogue between Henry and Catherine in the Beechen Cliff chapter with the doctor's discourse on fiction in the last chapter of *The Female Quixote*.

If one reads the two works side by side, one finds obvious parallels between Lennox's doctor and Henry: both are teacher figures and convey sophisticated ideas to a woman who is inferior in terms of her experience of the world (see Gardiner [1999]). Like Lennox's doctor, Henry displays features that are reminiscent of Samuel Johnson, especially when he pontificates on the correct use of the English language. Austen's novel, however, introduces some significant additional features to the conversation at Beechen Cliff. For one thing, there is a third character: Eleanor Tilney mediates between Henry and Catherine and breaks up the gendered equation of male instructor and female instructee (by showing that she is just as well-versed in literature and rhetoric as Henry). She also calls Henry's authority into question, playfully accusing him of being a patronizing pedant ("you are more nice than wise" [NA 104]). Reading is thus projected as a process that entails weighing Henry's 'lessons' against Eleanor's remarks. His utterances appear not so much as pieces of wisdom, with a ventriloquizing author using the character as a mouthpiece, but as statements that need to be evaluated within their specific communicative context.

Henry's authority is further called into question by the way in which his conversations with Catherine are placed in the context of a larger plot, namely the courtship between the two. In this way, Austen's text directs attention to the agenda Henry may have in wanting to teach Catherine – and to the question of how Catherine's role in this scenario can be described. The role of the teacher-student constellation for the courtship of the two characters is finally even addressed explicitly in a narratorial comment which assures the reader that Catherine's embarrassment about her ignorance in aesthetic matters is "misplaced":

> Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind, is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can.

> The advantages of natural folly in a beautiful girl have been already set forth by the capital pen of a sister author; – and to her treatment of the subject I will only add in justice to men, that though to the larger and more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, there is a portion of them too reasonable and too well informed themselves to desire any thing more in women than ignorance. (NA 106)

This commentary clearly counts as gnomic, as it departs from the fictional world and makes observations that can be read as statements about the workings of the extratextual world. In this case, Henry's didactic tendencies are analysed as part of a gendered social pattern. These observations, in turn, refer to a larger debate on the education of women that gained momentum in the last decades of the eighteenth century. In particular, they respond to the influential view (put forward, most prominently, by Jean Jacques Rousseau in *Emile, or On Education* [1762]) that the goal of a woman's education is to enable her to please men rather than to contribute to a cultivation of her mind for its own sake. This view was famously rebuked as sensualist and cynical by Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication* (see 2009: 28). In characterizing Henry's educational efforts as part of courtship behaviour, the narrator hints at their self-serving side (especially in the mock defence of the "reasonable and well-informed" men that do not go so far as to require "imbecility" in women). In this passage in *Northanger Abbey* as well as the one it alludes to, from Burney's *Camilla*,[16] the idea of the attraction of female ignorance is used to satirize an aspect of male sexuality and to ridicule a male sense of intellectual superiority.

By situating Henry's attempts to lecture Catherine in the larger context of female education and by casting a critical light onto the asymmetrical gender relations dominating the discourse on this issue, the novel raises the question in how far Henry can supply a moral standard for Catherine's education. This complication of Henry's status as a 'mouthpiece' for the author parallels a complication of the didactic impact of the narratorial voice itself. In the passage quoted above, the gnomic narratorial commentary is not characterized by a moralizing tone – it is put forward as a witty statement about typical (male) behaviour as a subject of detached observation. This impression is supported by the fact that the comment does not explicitly ascribe this brand of male vanity to Henry but rather non-committally suggests that he is no exception to the rule.

---

16 See Butler, note 5 in the Penguin edition of *Northanger Abbey* (2003). The passage Austen refers to is from chapter I.iv in *Camilla* and describes the effects that Indiana, the protagonist Camilla's beautiful but insipid cousin, has on men. The fixation on women's outward appearance (rather than their intellectual or moral qualities) is an important subject in *Camilla*. Burney explores it in depth by contrasting the courtship of Indiana with that of Camilla's sister Eugenia, who is a much more interesting and good-natured person but has the disadvantage of being ugly.

Reading is thus projected as taking a critical attitude rather than adopting the role of the instructee that is suggested by Catherine's unreserved admiration (although Henry still comes across as a predominantly positive character).

The problem of educational fiction is also taken up directly elsewhere in the novel. The most explicit treatment can be found in those passages where the attitude of Catherine's mother towards reading is satirized: she represents what one might call the 'pharmacist's view of reading'. When towards the end of the novel, Catherine returns from the Abbey in a dejected mood, her mother recommends a moral essay on the subject of "young girls that have been spoilt for home by great acquaintance" (NA 225). The passage further stresses Mrs Morland's naïve belief in reading as an instant moral remedy: she "hastily left the room to fetch the book in question, anxious to lose no time in attacking so dreadful a malady" (NA 225).

The comic representation of this view of reading on the level of the fictional characters is combined with a parodistic staging of sermonizing tendencies in some of the narratorial commentaries. In another extended narrative comment, Catherine's thoughts on the night before a dance are evaluated:

> What gown and what head-dress she should wear on the occasion became her chief concern. She cannot be justified in it. Dress is at all times a frivolous distinction, and excessive solicitude about it often destroys its own aim. Catherine knew all this very well; her great aunt had read her a lecture on the subject only the Christmas before; and yet she lay awake ten minutes on Wednesday night debating between her spotted and her tamboured muslin, and nothing but the shortness of time prevented her buying a new one for the evening. That would have been an error in judgment, great though not uncommon, from which one of the other sex than her own, a brother rather than a great aunt might have warned her, for a man only can be aware of the insensibility of man towards a new gown. It would be mortifying to the feelings of many ladies, could they be made to understand how little the heart of man is affected by what is costly or new in their attire; how little it is biassed by the texture of their muslin, and how unsusceptible of peculiar tenderness towards the spotted, the sprigged, the mull or the jackonet. [...] Woman is fine for her own satisfaction alone. No man will admire her the more, no woman will like her the better for it. [...] – But not one of these grave reflections troubled the tranquillity of Catherine. (NA 71–72)

The first few sentences of this passage look like a straight-forward moral denouncement of Catherine's 'frivolity'. The performance of authorship here suggests an instructive stance that one might also find in a conduct book. However, the next sentence introduces the aunt (apparently another believer in the medical value of reading), and now the previous utterances appear as mimicking the language of the conduct book lecture read to Catherine. The emphasis on the rather fleeting character of Catherine's interest in fashion (she spends merely ten minutes thinking about it, which can hardly be called obsessive) suggests that the reading stance projected here is sympathetic rather than judgmental: it appears to

invite the reader to take her side against a sermonizing rigid view according to which some harmless attention to dress is already an offense that needs to be rectified.

No sooner is the explicit didactic statement called into question, however, than a new way of evaluating Catherine's behaviour is put forward: the real problem with her preoccupation with dress is now an "error of judgment". What was labelled vanity a moment earlier is now considered a practical mistake: attention to dress is ineffective, as its object – the admiration of young men – cannot be obtained in this way. But this pragmatic attitude does not appear to be endorsed any more honestly than the moralistic evaluation in the beginning. Instead, the comment evokes and only ironically approves of the kind of woman who would consciously calculate the effect she has on men – behaviour the novel has already shown to be typical of Isabella Thorpe. The absence of "grave reflections" of this kind in Catherine's mind is surely a point in her favour, as it suggests her innocence. Evaluation, then, is anything but straight-forward in this commentary: simple vanity at first seems to be criticized but then turns out to be represented as comparatively harmless.

A third stage in the argument that is laid out in this passage complicates the idea of evaluation even further: it pits a typically male against a typically female view of the world and explores the value systems attached to each. Again, the target of the irony here is not easy to determine. On the one hand, most obviously, the authorial narrator seems to side against the women whose vain preoccupation with fashion details leads them to miscalculate the true interest of men. Also, the comment about other women's reactions in the penultimate sentence conjures up the image of catty female competitiveness. The lament about male "insensitivity" towards a new gown could in this context be read as ironic. On the other hand, the typically male view is not entirely endorsed either: while the attributes "little biassed" and "unsusceptible" make men seem superior in their judgment, the careful limitation of this male immunity to the area of minute particulars of fashion also suggests that they might instead be influenced by other equally superficial feminine attributes – be they physical or behavioural. Moreover, the authorial narrator assumes a mediating role between the sexes (rather than a reinforcement of the male side with its conventional disdain for female vanity) by displaying a detailed knowledge not only of male attitudes (the things Catherine could learn from a brother) but also of the very details that are so uninteresting to the typical men evoked here: there is something appreciative about this lingering on "the spotted, the sprigged, the mull or the jackonet". The passage that starts with an explicit attack on the interest in superficial details of fashion thus ends with an almost sisterly appreciation of such matters (a similar half-joking attention to fashion is also ascribed to Henry Tilney, who to the surprise of the female

characters in the book turns out to be knowledgeable on the subject of muslin, see NA 28).

Rather than criticizing one specific type, attitude, or habit, then, the passage serves to highlight the complex web of interrelating evaluations in human relationships. The irony that is employed in the narrator's commentary is reminiscent of what James Kim (writing about the fiction of Sarah Fielding) has called "sentimental irony". He characterizes sentimental irony as highlighting complexity and psychological principles, in contrast to "satiric irony", which "exposes disjunctions between 'appearance' and 'reality' in order to provoke ridicule and assign moral blame" (Kim 2010: 486). As Kim argues, sentimental irony serves to call into question rather than cement pre-conceived moral appraisals.

The passage is a good example of the relations between gnomic narratorial commentary and the didactic view of fiction. The complexity of the narratorial comments in *Northanger Abbey* is enhanced by the element of self-reflexivity that they involve. At the beginning of the passage, for example, the obvious victim (in Hutcheon's terminology) of narratorial irony is not a character in the story but a hypothetical reader who looks for explicit moral sermonizing in the conventionalized conduct-book style.[17] In employing sentimental irony as a specific mode of reader address which problematizes moral evaluation, the novel thus explores the issue of the moral purpose of fiction. The complex dramatization of different points of view projects the reading of fiction as an activity that balances critical distance, moral evaluation, and sympathetic response.

In some ways, Austen's technique in these narratorial comments is in fact very similar to that employed in those passages which are characterized by what has often been depicted as her signatory technique: free indirect discourse (FID). As Müller (2006), among others, has argued, free indirect discourse in Austen often serves to extend a character's moral profile. By forgrounding certain elements of a character's thoughts or speech, FID suggests a certain stance towards the character – a stance, however, that is not directly 'told' to the reader but that has to be deduced by weighing the expressed views against possible other ones.[18] Similarly, the narratorial commentary quoted above pits different points of view against each other. In the place of one character's point of view, it projects possible or even stereotypical attitudes the reader is invited to entertain or to reject.

---

17 'Victim' thus refers to the addressee who has taken the ironic statement at face value and is therefore potentially embarrassed, see Hutcheon (1995: 15).

18 Roy Pascal (1977) first put forward this idea of FID as a "dual voice", blending the voices of narrator and character in order to evoke affinity with or distance from the characters' point of view.

Fludernik comes to a similar conclusion about the employment of authorial narration in the work of George Eliot, in which "the impression of authority arises less from a consistent world view that is being propounded than from our connivance at Eliot's ironies" (Fludernik 2013: 21). In particular, Fludernik describes a technique she calls "reflectorization", i.e. "the miming of a particular story-internal viewpoint by the narrator who adopts the arguments, style, and vocabulary of a person (or, possibly, group of persons) inside the fictional world" (ibid.: 31). Reflectorization, in Eliot, is used to criticize the ideological position of this person or group. The passage from Austen quoted above works in a similar way in so far as it evokes notions that are then called into question, but the concept of reflectorization does not seem to fit, as the opinions are not identified with specific characters in the fictional world. Instead, they are posited as familiar ideological positions, which are then subtly undermined.

Müller and others argue that an increase in moral complexity derives from the phasing out of explicit narratorial commentary in favour of more character-oriented FID (one could also say: the receding of the authorial narrator behind the characters, or the preference of modes of 'showing' to modes of 'telling').[19] The way in which narratorial commentary is employed in the passages quoted above shows that such a juxtaposition of figural and authorial discourse needs to be rethought in order to do justice to the subtle effects that can be achieved by the latter. As in Fielding, the explicit performance of authorship here generates a higher degree of self-reflexivity and complexity.

Whately's contention quoted at the beginning of the chapter – that Austen's moral lessons can be "collected without any difficulty" – seems off the mark in light of these reassessments of her narrative technique. That readers did have widely differing opinions of what these lessons consisted in is a fact well documented by literary historians – as noted in the introduction to Mandal and Southam's comprehensive volume on *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe*, she is seen as "either a conservative advocate of existing orthodoxies or a subversive critic of her world" (2007: 10). The analysis of *Northanger Abbey*'s stance towards didactic fiction not only sheds light on the narrative techniques that are responsible for such difficulties in pinpointing the 'lesson', but also shows how, through the performance of authorship implicit in the gnomic commentary, the novel itself reflects on them as a central issue for fictional writing. Peter Knox-Shaw has convincingly described Austen's writing as "exploratory rather than dogmatic"

---

19 "Austens erzählkünstlerische Innovationen lassen eine genauere und subtilere Darstellung moralischer Sachverhalte zu, als das bei der expliziten, kommentierenden Lenkung des Lesers durch einen auktorialen Erzähler möglich wäre" (Müller 2006: 131).

(2004: 9). What has not been sufficiently recognized is that at least in *Northanger Abbey*, this effect stems from the marked use of gnomic narratorial commentary just as much as it does from free indirect discourse.

Susan Lanser has also defended the use of authorial commentary in *Northanger Abbey*: for her, it signals a welcome act of self-assertion on the part of the female author, as the commentaries "focus attention on the narrating subject, who constructs her status as moralist, wit, conscious artist, knowledgeable scholar, and literary judge" (1992: 67). These roles, I would add, all have their negative as well as their positive side – the scholar can be seen as a pedant, the moralist as a sermonizer, the literary judge as a faultfinder. The performance of authorship in *Northanger Abbey* appears to be even more playful – and possibly more self-conscious – than Lanser's quote suggests, insofar as it explores different sides of the spectrum and thus leaves it to the recipient to juggle the different reading stances that are evoked.

Reading and the Channelling of Emotions

Aside from the issue of didactics, the second controversial eighteenth-century discourse about possible effects of fictional reading that is revisited in *Northanger Abbey* is the debate concerning its impact on the reader's emotions. In the previous chapter, I have argued that in Lennox's novel, the idea that fiction makes its readers emotionally unstable is superseded by an emphasis on its cognitive effects. In *Northanger Abbey*, the problem of embodied reading makes another entrance. Possibly the most striking feature of the depictions of reading in the chapters set at the abbey is the emphasis on the way in which Catherine is affected emotionally: "her feelings at that moment were indescribable. Her heart fluttered, her knees trembled, and her cheeks grew pale. [...] Human nature could support no more. A cold sweat stood on her forehead, the manuscript fell from her hand" (NA 161). This almost hysterical state has ultimately been caused by Catherine's reading of Radcliffe, which induces her to see herself as a Gothic heroine and thus renders the (in itself rather unexciting) exploration of her own room an emotional roller-coaster ride. The detailed description of physiological reactions suggests a direct influence on the heroine's emotional state, without the interference or mediation of rational thought. Whereas *The Female Quixote* dismisses the issue of the emotional contagion of reading, *Northanger Abbey* thus makes it a central point.

For many commentators, it is therefore obvious that the novel is a response to a perceived threat posed by the recent success of Gothic fiction and that it creates an opposition between a kind of reading – and a kind of reader – characterized by affect, and another type of reading that privileges judgement and rational

thought.[20] While Catherine has to learn that her 'reading' of the real abbey is an irrational misinterpretation, the actual reader of *Northanger Abbey*, as Karin Littau argues, is also encouraged to adopt a non-emotional attitude towards the heroine: "rather than creating a bond of sympathy between Catherine and her reader, the narrative voice creates an ironic distance to Catherine, deliberately opening up a space for readers to judge her rather than identify with her" (Littau 2006: 71). For Littau, Austen's novel thus functions as a tract warning not only against the reading stance elicited by the Gothic novel of the 'school of terror', but also – and maybe even more importantly – against the danger of over-identification with the protagonists of the sentimental novel (her example is Goethe's *Werther*).[21] The idea that in Austen's œuvre a particular susceptibility to affect is seen as problematic seems to be supported by her treatment of the character of Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*: Marianne suffers because of her excess of feeling and finally has to relinquish her ideas of romantic love, while her more rational sister Elinor chooses more wisely and is rewarded with an emotionally satisfying marriage. Catherine thus may seem to be the first in a line of Austen heroines who are taught (and whose representations teach the reader) to progress from sensibility to sense. By the same token, *Northanger Abbey* may be seen as criticizing the sentimental novel – a genre that, in contrast to the Gothic novel, was already past its heyday by the time Austen finished her book.[22]

Criticism of the sentimental novel would certainly also fit with the ridicule heaped onto stereotyped writing in the first chapter of *Northanger Abbey*: the sentimental genre had brought forth a spate of formulaic productions which catered to the fashion with their "emphases on tearfulness, sympathy and benevolence" (Keymer 2005: 584). In the meantime, parodistic titles of works such as *The Curse of Sentiment* (1787), *Excessive Sensibility* (1787) and *The Man of Failing* (1789)[23] reflect a critical attitude towards the central tenets of the genre. The critique was directed against the excessive description of emotion in the form of physical agitation, but sentimental fiction was also seen as continuing the

---

20 Miranda Burgess (2009: 226) cites some examples.

21 For a detailed discussion of the continuities between the Gothic and the sentimental novel, see Wolf (1989).

22 "[I]n retrospect the 1770s can be seen to mark the peak for sentimental fiction. 'Six shillings worth of sensibility' (the phrase is from Helen Maria Williams) remained a viable product for decades, but as time went on even the most vacuous examples began to look uneasy with their own assumptions. In the 1780s there emerges a further line of novels which, even as they continue to rehearse the standard tropes of sentimental fiction, also advertise a critical detachment" (Keymer 2005: 573).

23 All listed in Keymer (2005: 575; 601).

romance tradition that had been denounced earlier in the century. For Mary Wollstonecraft, to name a prominent example, "sentimental" denoted a "romantic twist of the mind", characterized as a "feminine weakness of character often produced by a confined education" (Wollstonecraft 2009: 192). Wollstonecraft discusses this problem in the part of *Vindication* that lists contemporary female "follies" and identifies sentimental women as those who read the "reveries of the stupid novelists, who, knowing little of human nature, work up stale tales, and describe meretricious scenes, all retailed in a sentimental jargon, which equally tend to corrupt the taste, and draw the heart aside from its daily duties" (ibid.: 192–193).

The notion that it is the purpose of fiction to affect the reader's emotions is already complicated in early examples of the sentimental novel itself. A notable example is Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* (1744), which helped establish a pattern of representation geared towards an affect-based reception. Fielding's novel features an episodic plot centred on a protagonist (David Simple) who travels around London in search of true friendship. In the course of his journey, he listens to many people's stories and observes their behaviour, always willing to share their joy or grief. In contrast to most of the characters he encounters, David is portrayed as a model of benevolence and innocence, and while immoral behaviour mainly puzzles him, the misfortunes of good people move him both to tears and to charitable action. In thus providing examples of empathetic reception, Sarah Fielding employs her characters as "model readers" (Michie 2007: 100).

The idea that the characters' affective responses to the experiences they encounter are supposed to be brought into relation with the response of the novel's audience is spelt out in explicit reader addresses, as in this passage, which describes one of David's charitable acts:

> What this poor Creature, whose Heart was naturally tender and grateful, felt at seeing himself loaded with Benefits from a Stranger, I leave to the Imagination of every Reader, who can have any Sense of Obligations; and those that have none, I am sure must think enough of Trifles, to imagine he must be pleased, after being some time in Rags, to have whole Clothes put on. (DS 102)

The passage makes explicit how the emphasis on emotional response is linked to a moral reading by means of the reference to a "sense of obligations". This accords with the novel's general tendency to represent the episodes as examples, presenting stories that can serve as lessons. Chapter titles such as "In which is seen the terrible Consequences that attend Envy and Selfishness" also foreground this didactic mission. At the same time, the emotional response is not just represented as a means to an end but as a reward in itself: "sentimental anecdotes and vignettes are seen not just as adventures to entertain or moral lessons to

instruct, but also as little gifts of pure emotion we give to one another for the sake of the joy and renewal they bring" (Michie 2007: 100). Reading is projected as accepting such gifts and giving in to being affected by the text.

However, the dramatization of authorship and reader response once again turns out to be more intricate than it might at first seem. A stance that can also be detected in the passage quoted above is the acknowledgement of the *limits* of the ability of fictional texts to elicit specific emotions and thus to encourage compassionate reading. The passage juxtaposes two different kinds of readerly reaction: while a truly compassionate reader is able to imagine the feelings of the characters involved, as they fall into his or her own horizon of experience, there are also those with impoverished emotional faculties, who will merely be able to understand those feelings that are caused by self-interest. There are a number of similar passages throughout *David Simple* which suggest that while the story is geared towards eliciting emotional responses of the former kind, fictional representations cannot induce affects that are not already part of the reader's emotional spectrum. At the same time, this dramatization of an author-reader relation entails an exhortation to check whether an actual reader's own reactions match those that are endorsed, and possibly to strive harder for an empathetic stance. They thus project a reading stance that is both sensitive and self-critical.

The sentimental reader as he or she is parodied later in the century notably lacks such a self-questioning stance. The triggering of emotion has, for this reader, become an end in itself, a pleasurable wallowing which does not lead to any changes in behaviour. *Northanger Abbey* features a trenchant critique of this type of sentimental reader in the characterization of Isabella, Catherine's 'friend' in Bath. Isabella is well-versed in the language of sentiment and incessantly talks about friendship and emotion but at the same time lacks any genuine feeling. Her friendship to Catherine turns out to be self-serving, and even the naïve protagonist herself finally sees through Isabella's manipulative evocations of friendship and affection (see NA 203).

The implicit criticism of Isabella also serves to shed a more positive light on Catherine's susceptibility to the emotional contagion of books: what counts much in Catherine's favour is that, in contrast to Isabella, she does not affect a sentimental attitude because this is currently fashionable, but is actually capable of spontaneous feelings. In the course of the novel, the protagonist has to learn how to arrive at rational evaluations of the events and people around her – such as Isabella or General Tilney –, guided by her own growing experience and exchanges with well-meaning friends like Henry and Eleanor. What she is equipped with from the start, however, is a genuine sensitivity geared towards others, which makes her capable of true friendship. Her reaction to Gothic novels like *Udolpho*, then, is not only criticized as naïve but also confirms her emotional depth.

Through the depiction of Catherine as an innocently sentimental reader, the emotional impact of fictional reading is represented as an ambivalent issue. The good reader now is the one whose emotions can be involved but who then also has enough judgment and sober reflection to channel these emotions properly.

To say that *Northanger Abbey* constructs a dichotomy between (good) rationality/sense and (bad) emotion/sensibility in order to evaluate practices of reading thus does not seem to do justice to the treatment of emotion in the novel. Miranda Burgess points out that sensibility as a "complex of emotional demonstrativeness and analysis, aesthetic taste, and emphatic response" is treated in a circumspect manner in all of Austen's works as an "object of unresolved debate" (Burgess 2009: 226). With the story of Catherine's emotional and intellectual growth, *Northanger Abbey* charts the development of a model reader which exemplifies the necessity (but also the possibility) of balancing these reactions. In this sense, I see Austen as continuing rather than reacting against an ideal of reading as an empathetic *and* (self-)critical activity as it was projected in Sarah Fielding's early sentimental novel.

Consumerism and Communities of Taste

While the discussions of the didactic and the emotional effects of reading have shown that *Northanger Abbey* updates and further develops central concerns that are negotiated in *The Female Quixote*, Austen's novel is set apart by the extent to which reading is represented as an integral part of social relations. As Burgess observes, books function as a "common currency of social life" (2009: 232) throughout Austen's work, thus reflecting the establishment of fictional reading as an influential cultural institution. Similarly, Alan Richardson has remarked (but not expanded) on the social relevance of novel reading in *Northanger Abbey*, as it "promotes friendship, contributes to social distinction [and] forms a common topic and pursuit for men and women" (Richardson 2005: 400). I want to substantiate and further differentiate this claim for *Northanger Abbey* by showing precisely *how* novels are depicted as part of the social fabric. The novel, I argue here, juxtaposes two different models for reading communities: one that is evaluated in predominantly negative terms, linking reading with a materialistic consumerism, and another one that conceives of the reading community as a positively evaluated community of taste.

First of all, it is striking that reading plays a pervasive role in the action of *Northanger Abbey* on many levels. Compared to *The Female Quixote*, where enthusiasm for books is an idiosyncratic quirk on the part of the protagonist, shared only by select other figures, almost everybody in *Northanger Abbey* is a

reader. Conversations about reading make up a considerable portion of the novel's dialogue. More subtly, the assumption that everybody reads also extends to the level of discourse: the discussion of the first chapter of the novel and its special mode of disnarration has already highlighted one way in which the novel presupposes a familiarity with literary tradition on the part of the reader. A similar opposition of different modes of writing (and reading) – typical of quixotic novels in general – is of course also a key feature in *The Female Quixote*. The two works differ, however, in the casual manner in which Austen's novel presupposes specific types of literary knowledge on the part of its audience. In *The Female Quixote*, Arabella's reading is introduced in the exposition, and there are many hints which allow an audience only vaguely familiar with the French romance to infer what kind of material it encompasses. *Northanger Abbey*, by contrast, starts *medias in res* and introduces the main character by way of an elaborate play on established fictional conventions. To a much higher degree than Lennox's novel, then, Austen's projects novel reading as a well-versed negotiation of different subgenres of fiction. Marilyn Butler aptly compares this mode of writing to a game in which the author challenges the reader to employ expert knowledge of fictional writing: "you must be a novel-reader to play, or you will not pick up the clues; you must be a general reader to score well" (1995: xvi).

This extends to the knowledge of specific titles: in many passages, such references are used as shorthand to characterize certain figures. When Isabella's brother John Thorpe, for example, professes a dislike of all novels except for Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (see NA 47), he thus represents himself as a rather vulgar character.[24] When Isabella Thorpe denounces Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (which she has not even read) as "an amazing horrid book" (NA 40), this betrays her indifference to the representation of the subtleties of moral feeling so much appreciated by Johnson and others. At the same time, a well-informed reader can also enjoy Isabella's comment as an irreverent stab at the style of Richardson's later fiction, which some contemporary readers found plodding and which was perceived as old-

---

24 See Butler's note in the Penguin edition, which stresses that "both novels were frequently criticized for sexual impropriety" and suggests that Austen herself "had reservations about Fielding" for this reason. Conversely, Knox-Shaw (2004: 11, n33) points out that in fact, an early letter from 1796 shows that Austen herself enjoyed reading *Tom Jones*, and the notion that she disapproved of Fielding's "grossness" mainly stems from her brother Henry's "Biographical Note", written after her death. Regardless of Jane Austen's personal views on the matter, Henry Austen's "Note" shows that Fielding was widely seen as representing an interest in physicality irreconcilable with contemporary views on feminine sensibilities, and this would fit with Thorpe's character.

fashioned by many readers of Austen's generation. Isabella's reference to *Grandison* is thus amusing for those who can decipher the cultural references attached to the work; that Jane Austen could expect this of her readers shows how far the institutionalization of the novel had progressed. Moreover, by putting a premium on such literary skills, the novel not just reflects but itself is involved in creating a sense of a reading community.

Reading communities are also notably formed by the characters in the novel, and their depictions are used to engage with a whole range of anxieties and hopes about both the social effects and the status of novel reading. Catherine herself is involved in two radically different constellations in which reading is a central cohesive factor. The first one is her friendship with Isabella Tilney, who introduces her to the delights of the Gothic novel. The narratorial comment which ironically describes the "very warm attachment [...], originality of thought, and literary taste" of their relationship (NA 39) has already been cited above. The role of literature in friendship is further explored in the famous dialogue in which Catherine thanks Isabella for lending her *Udolpho*:

> "Oh! I am delighted with the book! I should like to spend my whole life in reading it. I assure you, if it had not been to meet you, I would not have come away from it for all the world."
> "Dear creature! How much I am obliged to you; and when you have finished Udolpho, we will read the Italian together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you."
> "Have you, indeed! How glad I am! – What are they all?"
> "I will read you their names directly; here they are, in my pocketbook. Castle of Wolfenbach, Clermont, Mysterious Warnings, Necromancer of the Black Forest, Midnight Bell, Orphan of the Rhine, and Horrid Mysteries. Those will last us some time." (NA 39)

The superficiality which marks this conversation, with its formulaic assertions of attachment, is, as has already been shown, characteristic of Isabella in general; clearly, her friendship is not to be seen as a valuable asset. On the contrary, Isabella appears as a potentially bad influence on Catherine. This passage helps to pinpoint the trouble: what is problematic about Isabella's way of reading is not that it contains especially worrying material (for example, the idea that the Gothic novel may be sexually suggestive is not brought into play), but the sheer amount of it, and the careless way in which the books are represented as interchangeable. Where Catherine is completely caught up in the experience of one book, for Isabella the books are items on a list that can be ticked off. In her list, the Gothic novel appears as the result of formulaic bulk production.

The preoccupation with consumption is also evident in Isabella's other interests: she loves shopping for clothes and accessories which she uses rather indiscriminately to attract the attention of men. When it comes to suitors, however, Isabella does have distinct criteria: as becomes clear from her treatment of

Catherine's brother James, she is determined to marry a wealthy man. Her consumerist attitude towards reading thus appears as part and parcel of her calculating and materialistic character. Through its personification in Isabella, the view of reading as just another means of popular entertainment is clearly rejected. This fits in with a larger tendency in Austen's work to depict and problematize the consumer culture of her day. Her novels, as Barbara Benedict points out, typically engage with the social implications of consumption by staging "the overlap between the material and the moral, the collaborative and the rivalrous, through her characters' encounters in thing-cluttered spaces from shops to libraries" (Benedict 2009: 343).[25]

Books play an especially interesting role in what Benedict calls the "commodification of sociability" (ibid.). While in the hands of a character like Isabella they become tokens of a superficial and materialistically oriented social exchange, books are also represented as expressing and facilitating a kind of sociability that is based on mutual respect and attachment. Such a form of interaction prominently features in the depiction of the friendship between Catherine and the Tilney siblings. The chapter in which the three go for a walk on Beechen Cliff can be read as encapsulating a counter-model for the social function of books. That this represents a fundamentally different model of a community and not just a difference that could be traced to variations in genre is emphasized by the use of parallels: both times, Catherine is at the centre of the social exchange, and both times, the same book – Radcliffe's *Udolpho* – is the literary object which facilitates it.

That the Beechen Cliff outing is set up as fundamentally different from the superficial exchanges with Isabella already becomes clear from its setting: Henry, Eleanor and Catherine go for a walk outside of Bath, away from the dancing halls and the streets. The freedom from stifling conventions that is implied by this setting is connected with the circumstance that this is the first opportunity Catherine and Henry have to enjoy a long conversation, undisturbed by the Thorpes or other "impertinent intrusions" (NA 102). The Beechen Cliff conversation is a key moment in their relationship, as the main characters finally get to confirm the favourable impressions they have already made on each other and engage in more than the small talk dictated by their previous meetings at dances and concerts. It is significant that this seminal exchange starts with remarks about fictional reading: the book is here represented as an indicator of taste, as

---

25 In her brilliant survey of the status and function of consumer items in Austen, Benedict (2009) includes sections on jewellery, food, and clothes, but not on books, despite her reference to libraries in the quotation above.

an aesthetic as well as a moral category.[26] The compatibility of their notions of what constitutes a good read is taken to signal an overall compatibility of character.

An important aspect of their rapport is Henry's rejection of the idea that novel reading is a typically female 'foible' – a notion dismissive towards both women and novels that was put forward even in proto-feminist texts such as Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Catherine echoes this negative view, defensively disparaging her own preferences, when she ventures that novels are not "clever enough" for gentlemen, who "read better books" (NA 102). Henry, however, endorses her literary taste, proclaiming that "[t]he person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid" (ibid.). In this configuration, the denial of gender-specific barriers of taste appears to be programmatic and promises at least a step towards an equal intellectual exchange between men and women.[27]

The foregrounding of a companionship that is based on common cultural interests is already an important motif in Radcliffe's novel. The Beechen Cliff episode can be read as an echo of the first part of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which the protagonist Emily, her father, and her later lover Valancourt travel through the mountains and are drawn together by their joint admiration for the beauties of nature. Catherine, in her conversation with Henry, even explicitly refers to this episode. In *Northanger Abbey*, the role of literature and art in this shared appreciation of natural scenes is emphasized even more strongly than in *Udolpho*, where the interplay of culture and nature in the formation of companionship is mainly connected with music rather than fiction.[28]

As Marilyn Butler points out (see 1995: xviii–xix), Austen's novel participates in an ongoing discussion about the link between genre and gender hierarchies in the late eighteenth century, instigated by Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance* (1785), which valorizes the romance as a prototypically female genre. Such a link

---

26 For a discussion of the history of the highly complex concept of 'moral taste' as a keystone for middle-class values from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, see Garson (2007: 6–17). Taste is the main subject of the Beechen Cliff conversation, which after a while moves from literature to drawing.

27 This accords with recent scholarship that has questioned the view of novel reading as a female pastime: Susan Carlile points out that the "belief that the novel was a female form because it addressed personal issues and feelings and because those who were interested in reading novels were thought to be primarily women", prevalent in the eighteenth century, was "likely a cultural fantasy and not a fact" (2011b: 16). A case study by Jan Fergus (2000) about English booksellers and consumers finds no evidence for the prevalence of women readers in the area of fiction.

28 For a discussion of reading in Radcliffe's novels as the protagonist's quest for consolation, see Bray (2009: 157–162).

between gender and genre is evoked in a later part of the Beechen Cliff conversa-
tion, where Catherine naïvely proclaims herself to be uninterested in any reading
besides novels as well as "poetry and plays, and things of that sort" (NA 104), and
describes historical writing as dull and tiresome. This attitude is ridiculed by
Henry. However, Eleanor's characterization as equally educated and eloquent as
her Oxford-trained brother forestalls the impression that Catherine's lack of
intellectual interest is innately female (see Butler 1995: xx). Rather, the represen-
tation of Catherine's limited reading and conversation skills in this passage is
reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's verdict that the perceived simplicity of women is
the result of deficiencies in education, not in aptitude. The community of readers
that is envisaged here, by contrast, is one in which the genders converse on an
equal footing.

In addition, the Beechen Cliff dialogue disputes the genre hierarchy that is
also exemplified in Wollstonecraft's comments: that novel reading is clearly
inferior to the reading of historical or philosophical texts.[29] While in the case of
Catherine, an exclusive focus on fictional literature is indeed associated with
ignorance, this does not entail an argument for the inherent superiority of other
kinds of writing. Catherine's and Eleanor's comments about the use of fictional
"embellishments" in historical writing may even be understood as questioning
the clear distinction between fiction and historical writing (cf. Butler 1995: xx). In
conjunction with the famous "Defense of the Novel", which will be analysed in
the next section, the Beechen Cliff passage thus offers a confident assertion of the
novel's important role in the system of literature. This claim is not only voiced in
the conversation but also staged through the depiction of fictional reading as a
cohesive factor in a quasi-utopian representation of sociability.

Reconsidering the Defense of the Novel

If there is a single most famous passage from *Northanger Abbey*, it is probably the
"Defense of the Novel", in which the authorial narrator puts forward a spirited
plea in favour of the novelist's craft. The passage has certainly occasioned some
head-scratching: scholars have disagreed on whether it should be taken as a
straightforward or ironical commentary. Patrick Brantlinger disapprovingly re-
marks that it is "often taken at face value" despite that fact that it is embedded in

---

29 As discussed in the chapter on Lennox, Wollstonecraft does end up defending the novel as
reading material for women, but mainly in derogatory terms, for those who are not trained to deal
with more challenging works (see 2009: 193).

a novel which itself parodies fictional writing (Brantlinger 1998: 3). In particular, it is confusing that the "Defense" starts out as a comment on Catherine's and Isabella's reading of Gothic novels, which is ridiculed as an example of commercial reading in the very next chapter. Brantlinger himself does not offer a detailed interpretation of his own but implies that these contradictions mirror the ambivalent status of the novel at the time, which he sees as supporting his thesis of the genre's own "inferiority complex" (1998: 3–4). Similarly, Butler labels the passage "mock-solemn" (1995: xx) and argues that a serious engagement with the novel/romance debate is to be found in the Beechen Cliff conversation rather than here.

I agree with Brantlinger and Butler that the passage has ironic undertones. Nonetheless, Brantlinger overstates Austen's critical attitude towards novels in general and romance fiction in particular. *Northanger Abbey*, as I have argued, may satirize particular reading habits, but its main theme is a playful promotion of fictional reading (including 'realist' works and the Gothic novel) as a cherished, even if not universally accepted, pastime. If one looks closely at the target of the irony in the passage, it becomes clear that what it is about is not primarily the question of the dangers and benefits of novel reading for individual recipients. As Claudia L. Johnson suggests, in the "Defense", "Austen's narrator hoists the literary system on its own petard" (2001: 163). Elaborating on Johnson's view, I argue that the main subject of the passage reflects an interest in reading as an institutionalized practice rather than as a cognitive process or social behaviour. What is satirized is the ongoing debate on the novel's status in the newly emerged "print culture" – to return to Siskin's (2005: 822) description of the literary environment in late eighteenth-century Britain. By means of a complex performance of authorship that involves a negotiation of different stances and a multitude of references, the passage dissects the power relations informing this system. It thus carves out a space to position novel reading as a specific practice:

> [I]f a rainy morning deprived them [Isabella and Catherine] of other enjoyments, they were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt, and shut themselves up, to read novels together. Yes, novels; – for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding – joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas! if the heroine of one novel not be patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost

as many as our readers. And while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens, – there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and under-valuing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances who have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them. – 'It is really very well for a novel.' – Such is the common cant. 'And what are you reading, Miss – ?' 'Oh! it is only a novel!' replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. – 'It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;' or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delinea-tion of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language. Now, had the same young lady been engaged with a volume of the Spectator, instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the book, and told its name; though the chances must be against her being occupied by any part of that voluminous publication, of which either the matter or manner would not disgust a young person of taste; the substance of its papers so often consisting in the statement of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation, which no longer concern any one living; and their language, too, frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it. (NA 36–37)

The passage clearly addresses the dubious status of the genre that had been reflected in debates in the earlier eighteenth century. Interestingly, however, the authorial narrator in this 'defense' does not bother with a rebuttal of individual points of attack against the novel or with developing an argument that details which fictional works may be seen as achieving positive effects in their readers (as the doctor does in the final chapter of *The Female Quixote*). Instead, novels are assertively characterized as containing "the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour" and "the best chosen language". This judgement is casually introduced, as if it were an objective and self-evident description rather than an evaluation that would need to be justified. As Johnson points out, the word "only" that prefixes the assessment is used ironically, as "not a disclaimer but an intensifier" (2001: 163). Both these details, I would add, serve to foreground the distance between a perceived conventional view of the novel and the one that is put forward here. The performance of authorship thus suggests a far more self-assured stance on the part of the novel writer than that assumed at the end of *The Female Quixote*, where Richardson's works are so cautiously presented as a special model for avoiding the pitfalls of fictional writing.

The use of personal pronouns also contributes to this sense of self-assurance. Elsewhere in the book, the first-person singular in narratorial commentary is used very sparingly (the 'Defense' is only the second instance in which it is used at all, as most other comments are written in the passive voice). The repeated use here (e.g. "I cannot approve of it") thus makes the passage stand out and produces the

impression that it is a bold statement in the service of a personal mission. Furthermore, the use of the first-person plural proclaims a common interest of novel writers as a group. It has both an appellative and an affirmative aspect: it calls for loyalty between individual writers and at the same time already predicates the existence of a definable group. There is thus a strong sense that the authorial voice assumes the role of a lobbyist for friends of the novel – both writers and readers. On the one hand, this accords with Susan Lanser's argument that the foregrounded use of authorial voice in women's novels like *Northanger Abbey* can be read as a "sign of emerging moral and intellectual authority for the novelist" – the sense that fictional writing is not only defensible, but in some ways even superior to nonfiction (Lanser 1992: 64). On the other hand, the passage, as I see it, dramatizes this sense of authority as an *embattled* stance that needs to be defended. The main battleground, however, is no longer the question whether fiction can offer moral or analytical insights, but whether the reading of fiction can be established as a valued cultural practice in a literary system in which the status and popularity of texts are to a large degree linked to forms of social power.

The emphasis on an approach to novel reading as an institutionalized practice which is affected by social hierarchies is evident in the passage's focus on the motivation of the genre's detractors rather than its moral effects or its typical content. The authorial narrator anatomizes the various reasons for criticism, which are all exposed as self-serving and hypocritical. Different interest groups and their stances are distinguished from each other. There are the novel writers, who are not as loyal to each other as their own interest would demand: they act against each other, using their own literary characters as puppets. The imagined contest between different novel heroines is reminiscent of the scenes described in many eighteenth-century novels (e.g. *The Female Quixote or* Burney's *Camilla*), in which women see each other as competitors, and praise for the beauty of one is thought to detract from the fame of the other. It is implied that a similar impulse motivates those authors of novels who foreground contrasts to other works in order to let their own productions appear in a more flattering light – ultimately, as the passage suggests, a self-defeating strategy. The literary scene is thus described as an arena in which more and less powerful individuals and subgroups vie for status and influence.

The criticism another group directs against the novel is similarly represented in terms of a power struggle: reviewers are implicitly characterized as a group whose whole *raison d'être* is to revile the novel. Their objections are discredited not only by the hint that their position is parasitical upon that of the author, but also, more prominently, by the assertion that instead of putting forward informed and well-reasoned criticism adequate to the works they are engaging with, the

critics only produce generalized and well-worn clichés ("talk in threadbare strains") about the wave of 'trash' flooding the literary market.

The group whose undervaluing of the novel is examined in most detail, however, is that which is usually thought of as its core audience: young women. They commonly read and enjoy novels but at the same time seem to agree with a description of their own pursuit as trivial. The inclusion of typical specimens of direct speech as sound bites ("'I am no novel reader – I seldom look into novels – Do not imagine that I often read novels'") serves to emphasize the conventionality of this attitude. The readers here are ridiculed for their eagerness to control how they appear to others by disavowing their real preferences ("affected indifference") or characterized as having internalized the idea that novel reading is an inferior pastime ("momentary shame"). As in the case of the authors and critics, then, the focus is shifted from intrinsic concerns about novel-reading itself to the extrinsic factors that shape the social conversation on the pursuit.

A further target of the attack mounted by the 'Defense' is the process by which some cultural productions are assessed as being more valuable than others. There is a dismissive characterization of the kind of writing the novelist has to compete with for the favour of the reading public, personified by the "nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or [...] the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne". The attack, first of all, pivots on the issue of originality: the public is criticized for preferring the regurgitation of extracts from productions by established literary authorities to new work. Another aspect is that of a contest between genres: by way of listing Milton, Pope and Prior, (epic) poetry is evoked as a competitor. The notion of patronage is brought in to suggest that the higher standing these works enjoy in the literary hierarchy is owed to good connections rather than intrinsic merit, while the novelist's efforts, as the ironical comment has it, have "only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them". Finally, gender obviously plays an important role as a factor in the literary status game: the choice of works suggests that one point of criticism is that while works by women and with female protagonists, such as Burney's *Cecilia* and *Camilla* and Edgeworth's *Belinda* – all highly esteemed by Austen herself –[30] are treated with condescension, male poets (some controversial for their treatment of women characters) are respected.[31]

---

30 See Butler (1995: xxii–iii). Cf. also Mandal (2007b: 52–56) on Austen as a proud subscriber to Burney's *Camilla*.

31 This point is also made by Jacqueline Pearson, who characterizes the 'Defense' as designed to "attack a spurious cultural authority" and "privileging of male literature" (1999: 211).

A work that is singled out particularly in this attack is Addison and Steele's *Spectator*. This may be interpreted as belabouring the same point about gender – Bradbrook (1966: 5), for one, puts this criticism down to the *The Spectator*'s "offensive air of patronage" towards women.[32] The terms in which *The Spectator* is criticized, however – its characterization as containing mainly "statement[s] of improbable circumstances, unnatural characters, and topics of conversation" – seem not only to be a satirical exaggeration, but also oddly off-target. The description appears to be more adequate as a summary of common complaints about romance novels than as an apt criticism of the kind of essay on moral, philosophical, and aesthetic questions for which *The Spectator* was still renowned in the later part of the eighteenth century. The flippant remark that its topics "no longer concern any one living" and that the language "is frequently so coarse as to give no very favourable idea of the age that could endure it" (this as a characterization of a publication that was prominently concerned with questions of taste and aesthetics!) also suggests that what is ridiculed here is not only Addison and Steele's writing.

The main target of criticism here, in my view, is an undiscerning reading public which does not applaud the essays in *The Spectator* because of a real appreciation of their form or content but because its members want to be regarded as educated. If the young lady in question were honest, she would have to admit to being bored to death by the unfashionable topics and instructive *exempla* featuring women named *Eudosia* or *Artemisia*. Like people, the 'Defense' implies, books are too seldom judged on their own merit. The passage, to put it in a nutshell, renders a critical description of the use of books as cultural capital, doling out criticism to all parties involved in the literary system, be they authors, readers, or critics.[33] *Northanger Abbey* thus not only examines the workings of literature as a cultural institution by assessing the promises, limits and status of

---

32 He also points to another passage in Austen's work that suggests a similar attitude towards the male-dominated literary establishment: in *Persuasion*, Anne Elliott complains that "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything" (Austen 2003 [1818]: 220).

33 Affinities between Jane Austen's writing and Pierre Bourdieu's theory have been noted before, for example by Marjorie Garson, who in *Moral Taste: Aesthetics, Subjectivity and Social Power in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* mainly uses Bourdieu's framework to examine "the ideological work done by the equation of good taste and moral refinement in a selection of nineteenth-century writings" (2007: 4). In her interpretation of *Mansfield Park*, Garson also finds an awareness on the part of Austen of the "material and cultural resources" that underlie the seemingly natural category of taste (ibid.: 26).

the novel within this institution, but it also provides a critical perspective on the workings of the system of which it is itself a part.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

When Jan Fergus calls *Northanger Abbey* "by far the most 'bookish' of Austen's novels" (1983: 11), this reads as a slight disparagement rather than a compliment. If regarded on its own terms, however, *Northanger Abbey*'s 'bookishness' – its web of intertextual references and allusions on both the levels of the story and the discourse – turns out to be an instrument for asserting and at the same time also analysing the significance of the novel as an emerging genre. The quixotic plot which centres on Catherine Morland's enthusiasm for the Gothic novel is embedded in a representation of the society surrounding her as one in which reading – not only, but also of prose fiction – has become an established part of social life. By weaving together intertextual references to a host of specific novels on the levels of the plot and the discourse, Austen stakes a claim for the genre's cultural significance as a cherished part of cultural life.

This interest in the institutionalization of the novel is signalled by a shift in the way in which the quixotic plot is employed. While the exploration of the dangers and benefits of fictional reading was a central and explicit part of Lennox's novel, in Austen these discourses are discussed at one remove. Instead of engaging on one or the other side of the debates, *Northanger Abbey* reduces their urgency. Both the instructional and the emotional impact of novel reading are acknowledged, but the force of their impact on the reading individual is represented as fairly limited. Catherine's reaction to the books she reads reflects rather than determines her character and development. The significance of novel reading is instead associated with its role in the formation of communities of taste. The main criticism with regard to reading is reserved for the hierarchies within the institution of literature, in which too often cultural capital is preferred to aesthetic value or to other pleasures reading can impart.

Northanger Abbey can be regarded as a central literary contribution to the larger movement towards a canonization of the novel at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as represented by Anna Laetitia Barbauld's anthology *The British Novelists*, published in fifty volumes (1810) and Sir Walter Scott's ten-volume selection *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* (1821–1824). Barbauld's enterprise in particular is concordant with Austen's take on the novel as a genre: her selection of twenty-eight eighteenth-century novels includes works by the authors that are explicitly praised in Austen's work, Frances Burney and Ann Radcliffe (including *The Mysteries of Udolpho*), as well as *Northanger Abbey*'s implicit pretext, *The Female Quixote*. Not only does Barbauld share a similar idea of a

heritage of the English novel and the important landmarks in its development (see Johnson 2001: 174); in her introduction to the anthology she also echoes the mixture of assertion and defiance that characterizes the "Defense of the Novel":[34]

> A collection of Novels has a better chance of giving pleasure than of commanding respect. Books of this description are condemned by the grave, and despised by the fastidious; but their leaves are seldom found unopened, and they occupy the parlour and the dressing-room while productions of higher name are often gathering dust upon the shelf. It might not perhaps be difficult to show that this species of composition is entitled to a higher rank than has been generally assigned it. (Barbauld 1810: 1)

Again, the question of the 'rank' of literary productions – and, concomitantly, their perusal – appears as a political as well as an aesthetic issue. Furthermore, Barbauld states what Austen implies in the characterization of the literary habits of her characters: novel reading has become a wide-spread, popular pastime. This is a far cry from Samuel Johnson's cautious and slightly contemptuous assessment of a cultural practice in which a wide range of people participated, including women and adolescents ("the young, the ignorant, and the idle", 1969 [21]). In both Austen's and Barbauld's writing, the idea of novel reading as a pastime for everybody is represented as a reason to take it more, rather than less, seriously.

The figure of the quixote – and in particular of the female quixote – is a perfect reflector for this political dimension of reading insofar as she, also, is in danger of being ridiculed and marginalized. Half a century later, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, in *The Doctor's Wife*, revisits the issue of the novel's cultural capital from a psychological point of view by representing it as an integral part of the quixotic reader's own mental make-up.

---

34 Jocelyn Harris also argues that "Austen seems often to have inhabited the same discursive universe as Barbauld" (2014: 257) and traces the intersections between Barbauld's writing and Austen's novels. Both Johnson (2001) and Harris speculate that Barbauld's writing on novels may have influenced Austen's "Defense", which would mean that Austen did after all make substantial changes to the manuscript of *Northanger Abbey* before it was published. While the obscure publication history of *Northanger Abbey* makes it hard to prove this point, the scholarly resurrection of Barbauld as a critical writer sheds light on the early stages of the canonization of the English novel and highlights the central function of woman authors in this process.

Chapter 5
Psychologizing Reading as Social Behaviour: Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife*

In the course of the nineteenth century, the novel gained cultural significance in ways that went beyond the recognition that Austen and Barbauld had been lobbying for. Ina Ferris describes this as a process in which a new type of literary criticism "harnessed fiction's own distinctive powers for the work of national consolidation in a period of massive upheavals both at home and abroad":

> [A] new and newly powerful critical discourse pioneered by the *Edinburgh Review* began to recognize in novelistic fictions a power allied to its own middle-class ambitions [...]. As they engaged in constructing their own national authority, high cultural quarterlies and monthlies set about paying more serious attention to novels, including them within the terms of their discourse rather than regarding them primarily as occasions for mockery, dismissal and diatribe. (Ferris 2009: 474)

In such writing, novel reading as a practice was associated with self-education, acquisition of knowledge, and training in "the virtues of prudence, order and rationality" (ibid.: 475). When in 1874 the journalist and poet Alfred Austin complained of the bad habit of "novel drinking" that had befallen his contemporaries (Austin 1874: 253), he framed his attack as a minority position, a polemic against an established view of reading as an "education in itself" (ibid.: 251).

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* was published in 1864, during the High Victorian golden age of the novel that had recently seen the publication of acclaimed works such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1846–1848), *Bleak House* (1852–1854) and *Great Expectations* (1860–1861), George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847–8) and *Pendennis* (1848–1850), and Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* (1854) and *Barchester Towers* (1857). While Lennox and Austen used the quixotic plot in a cultural conversation that established the credentials of the novel as an emerging genre, *The Doctor's Wife* both reflects on and contributes to a literary milieu in which the genre of the novel had become an acknowledged part of education. Debates about the threats posed by fiction were more and more dominated by the idea of a subdivision between 'serious' and 'popular' types of novels. Braddon's novel updates the quixotic plot by boldly going where neither Austen's nor Lennox's novels had gone: the protagonist, Isabel Gilbert (née Sleaford), avid reader of

quite a few of the afore-mentioned authors, is drawn into an extramarital relation-
ship and almost commits adultery. Her reading is directly connected with this
scandalous behaviour. Instead of featuring a cause-and-effect model, however, in
which good reading encourages good and bad reading bad behaviour, Braddon's
novel explores the process by which patterns found in fiction become templates
that are then used to deal with the real world. Reading fiction is thus represented
as an integral part of a minutely drawn psychological profile.

Critics have tended to see *The Doctor's Wife* as a work in which Braddon
employs the quixotic plot in order to express a critical distance to her own earlier
work.[1] As one of the most popular novelists of her time, she was both celebrated
and reviled for her key role in developing the subgenre of the 'sensation novel',
which embodied everything the respectable High Victorian novel was not sup-
posed to be: designed to thrill a mass audience with racy plots centring on
scandal and crime (see Gilbert 2011b). *The Doctor's Wife* appeared shortly after
Braddon's highly successful sensation novels *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and
Aurora Floyd (1863) and is presented as a different, more serious kind of fiction,
with the authorial narrator emphasizing that "This is *not* a sensation novel" (TDW
358). As in Lennox's and Austen's texts, however, the quixotic plot is not primar-
ily used to criticize a particular subgenre of fictional narrative but put into the
service of a more comprehensive analysis of the purpose, effects, and status of
novel reading as a practice. Braddon's work both represents and complicates
tendencies to establish clear boundaries between officially sanctioned, accepta-
ble reading practices and their unruly, unendorsed counterparts, in particular
various ways of reading for self-gratification. Overall, it thus engages with anxi-
eties about the 'dark side' of reading during the golden age of the novel.

In the following, I will build on the work of those critics who have highlighted
how self-assuredly the novel explores issues of reading and gender (in particular,
Flint [1993: 288–293], Golden 2003 and Pykett 1998). *The Doctor's Wife*, in my
reading, features a female reader as a particularly apt test case to explore the
psycho-social implications of reading fiction. It examines the potential influence

---

1 See especially Brantlinger (1998) and Nemesvari (2011). Most of Braddon's work sank into
obscurity in the twentieth century (a notable exception is the biography [1979] and edition of her
letters [1974] by Robert Lee Wolff). She has only relatively recently been rediscovered as a major
writer of interest by feminist critics (e.g. Flint 1993, Golden 2003) and is now one of the central
figures for a new focus on the genre of the sensation novel, which must be seen in the context of a
heightened interest in genre fiction initiated in cultural studies. See, for example, Pykett (1994)
and Pykett's introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of 1998; cf. also Edwards (2008)
and especially Pamela K. Gilbert's *Companion to Sensation Fiction* (2011a), which dedicates no
fewer than 5 of its 48 sections to Braddon and her work.

of narrative patterns on perceptions of reality and it also reflects on contemporary debates about the role of reading in habit formation.

The plot can be summed up in a few sentences: Isabel Sleaford, born into a lower middle-class family, grows up doing nothing much at all except reading novels. When her father's business goes bankrupt, she is offered a position as a governess at the house of the philanthropic Charles Raymond. There, she renews her acquaintance with the country doctor George Gilbert and without long deliberation accepts his offer of marriage, although she does not love him. It comes as no big surprise, then, that after her wedding she falls in love with Roland Lansdell, a young squire who lives in the neighbourhood, writes gloomy poems, and is notable for his Byronic good looks. Roland and Isabel often meet to go for walks and read together, but Isabel stops short of beginning an actual affair. When Roland suggests that they run away to Europe together, she is appalled and ends the relationship. A little later, her husband, surprisingly, dies from a fever, never having found out about his wife's affections for another man. Roland also dies in more dramatic circumstances and leaves a large share of his money to Isabel, who never again finds love but spends the rest of her days quite contentedly, involved in social projects.

Reading, in this story, is intimately connected with Isabel's desire for self-expression. Where *The Female Quixote* focuses on the problem of moral instruction and foregrounds this by presenting a heroine who is genuinely (and innocently) unable to perceive the differences between the world represented in her fiction and that around her, the protagonist of *The Doctor's Wife* is all too aware of the contrast between herself and the heroines in her books. Braddon's novel provides an analytic dissection of the needs that Isabel tries to fulfil by reading, and of the forces that limit her ability to do so.

The passage that first introduces this psychologized intradiegetic reader serves as an illustrative example of the novel's distinctive ways of representing reading as a practice, as it already sets up many of the important themes. This passage is not placed at the very beginning of the text. In contrast to Lennox and Austen, Braddon does not start her novel with an expository passage on her main character's development and the role of her reading. Instead, the protagonist Isabel Sleaford first appears in the third chapter. She is observed by two other characters: her future husband, the naïve country doctor George Gilbert, and his school friend, the author Sigismund Smith. Together, the two young men arrive at the Sleaford house, where they encounter Isabel in the garden:

> It was a dear old untidy place, where the odour of distant pigsties mingled faintly with the perfume of the roses; and it was in this neglected garden that Isabel Sleaford spent the best part of her idle, useless life.

> She was sitting in a basket-chair under one of the pear-trees when Sigismund Smith and his friend went into the garden to look for her. She was lolling in a low basket-chair, with a book on her lap, and her chin resting on the palm of her hand, so absorbed by the interest of the page before her that she did not even lift her eyes when the two young men went close up to her. She wore a muslin dress, a good deal tumbled and not too clean, and a strip of black velvet was tied round her long throat. Her hair was almost as black as her brother's, and was rolled up in a great loose knot, from which a long untidy curl fell straggling on her white throat – her throat was very white, with the dead yellowish whiteness of ivory. (TDW 23)

The choice of this *medias-in-res* introduction of the protagonist has two important effects: firstly, the presentation of a particular scene foregrounds reading as a physical activity (a recurring theme throughout the novel). In Lennox's and Austen's texts, the act of reading itself is only rarely described, which is in keeping with their emphasis on the cognitive rather than the physical effects of fiction. Accordingly, in these novels, the content of the books in question as well as their effect on the protagonists and on conversations they have about these contents with other characters are more important than the activity of reading itself. In *The Doctor's Wife*, by contrast, reading as a habit becomes a central issue. Secondly, by representing the intradiegetic reader as seen from the outside perspective of two other characters, the novel from the start highlights the question of how a person engaged in the act of reading appears to those around her. This turns out to be a point of far more than just individual sympathy or antipathy: through the specific focus on the reader as a spectacle, Braddon evokes prevalent contemporary attitudes towards reading as a socially embedded activity.

Beyond these general effects, the particular staging of the protagonist in this passage already suggests the novel's complex relation to the history of representations of the reader. It engages with a long-standing criticism of fictional reading as encouraging idleness and licentiousness by condensing such criticism into the image of the 'lolling woman'. The passage, as my close reading in the next section demonstrates, is a good starting point for exploring how both these anxieties about reading, which connect to larger contemporary debates, are evoked and then complicated in the course of the novel. Furthermore, the representation of the female reader as a kind of *femme fatale* draws on the representation of the most famous quixotic reader in nineteenth-century European fiction, Gustave Flaubert's Emma Bovary. As the intertextual blueprint for *The Doctor's Wife*, *Madame Bovary* (1856–7) looms large as a model; in her rewriting, however, Braddon introduces significant differences which amount to an overall more sympathetic portrait of the female reader's predicament. The analysis of the relation between the two novels also feeds into a larger discussion on the psychological and social factors for the development of the quixotic reader. The

final section of the chapter turns away from Isabel and focusses on the role of an apparently minor character, the author Sigismund Smith, whose experiences with the contemporary literary scene serve to explore a view of reading novels as an institutionalized practice.

Reading as a Bad Habit: Idleness and Licentiousness

The novel's growing respectability during the course of the nineteenth century, as charted by Ferris (2009), was predicated on the notion of a reading practice that could foster self-education, acquisition of knowledge, and training of virtues: novel reading could now, at least in certain conditions, be understood as a good habit. The introduction of Isabel Sleaford in the garden scene presents a counter-pole to this ideal: she is introduced as the epitome of a reader interested solely in pleasure. In several ways, it is suggested, her reading practice falls short of culturally sanctioned patterns – despite that fact that she has been described as an ambitious reader who "settled at once upon the highest blossoms in the flower-garden of fiction" (TDW 28). The passage reflects a particular approach to reading that is much more prominent in Braddon's novel than in the two earlier quixotic texts. It introduces the question of under which circumstances reading as an activity constitutes a good or a bad habit. Two particular concerns are fore-grounded: the relation between reading and idleness, and the relation between reading and licentiousness – both problems that were not new in the nineteenth century, but that had become more complex in the context of a general acceptance of fictional reading as a means of self-improvement.

The description of Isabel's pose, first of all, strongly suggests that her reading is a type of inactivity rather than activity. This in itself would not necessarily have to be regarded as negative, and in some ways, the image of the reader that is presented is charming – the smell of the roses and the woman's position under the tree suggest an atmosphere of contemplative tranquillity.[2] This hint of a positive evaluation of Isabel's passivity (or rather, non-activity), however, is undermined by references to decay and disarray, such as the smell of dung, the

---

2 For a discussion of the converging views on idleness in influential late-eighteenth-century schools of thought, particularly the positive aspects in Friedrich Schiller's notions of aesthetic education and the negative aspects in Jeremy Bentham's models of utilitarian education, see Adelman (2011: 38–67).

disordered state of the garden, and her dishevelled dress. These features associate Isabel's reading with indolence as a blameworthy type of behaviour.

Reading, however, is not only represented as idle in the sense that it constitutes a temporary waste of time that might better be spent otherwise. In foregrounding the habitualness of the protagonist's complete immersion in her books ("it was in this neglected garden that Isabel Sleaford spent the best part of her idle, useless life"), the novel situates the issue of idleness within the larger framework of contemporary thought on self-improvement. This ideology is encapsulated in the work of Samuel Smiles, the Scottish social reformer and arbiter of a Protestant work ethic: for Smiles, reading plays a key role in the project of self-cultivation, through the instilling of habits. In his widely-read book *Self-Help* – published in 1859, five years before Braddon's novel – Smiles invokes every individual's potential (and, at the same time, moral responsibility) to ensure success in life by means of hard work. The development of a daily routine is represented as the key to self-improvement, and reading is seen as one important factor in such a routine. Elsewhere, Smiles praises the improving influence of particular books, especially the biographies of great men but also works by authors like Shakespeare or Defoe,[3] and thus champions the familiar idea of books as providing concrete models for good behaviour. In *Self-Help*, however, he takes a different direction: here, he is concerned with reading in general rather than with the perusal of particular books. As a rule, he argues, the activity of reading is to be seen in a positive light only insofar as it serves the "cultivation of the habit of mental application" (Smiles 1897: 320). Smiles warns that pride in the contemporary "literary culture" might be misplaced: where reading is not part of rigorous labour, it threatens to become

> the indulgence of a sort of intellectual dram-drinking, imparting a grateful excitement for the moment, without the slightest effect in improving and enriching the mind or building up the character. Thus many indulge themselves in the conceit that they are cultivating their minds, when they are only employed in the humbler occupation of killing time, of which perhaps the best that can be said is that it keeps them from doing worse things. (Ibid.: 327)

What is particularly problematic, in Smiles's view, is "multifarious reading" – a phenomenon typical of new patterns of behaviour indicative of a general cultural decline:

> The evil is a growing one, and operates in various ways. Its least mischief is shallowness; its greatest, the aversion to steady labour which it induces, and the low and feeble tone of mind which it encourages. If we would be really wise, we must diligently apply ourselves, and

---

3 "A good book may be among the best of friends" (Smiles 1878: 264). Cf. also ibid.: 282.

confront the same continuous application which our forefathers did; for labour is still, and ever will be, the inevitable price set upon everything which is valuable. (ibid.: 325)

Reading as dissipated consumption is juxtaposed here with the superior kind of reading that is active and activating: reading as labour, which strengthens the mind as exercise would strengthen a muscle. This physiological image is inherent in the notion of bad reading as inducing a "low and feeble tone of mind", which negatively compares the mental state induced by reading to the "degree of firmness or tension proper to the organs or tissue of the body in a strong and healthy condition."[4] The bad habit of "multifarious" reading, then, is insidious not only because it wastes time without bringing adequate gain but because it has a more permanent effect, not only being a *sign* of laziness but actually *making* the reader lazier and more stupid.[5] Novel reading is singled out as particularly detrimental – the epitome of the "dram-drinking" reader is one who "make[s] it [the novel] the exclusive literary diet" and "devour[s] the garbage with which the shelves of circulating libraries are filled" (ibid.: 333). In the logic of the 'reading as training' idea, it makes sense that any kind of reading that does not require special effort is potentially problematic, and the conjunction with the READING IS EATING metaphor here suggests damage of the kind a bad diet does to the body.[6]

This notion of reading as a part of habit formation (rather than a series of individual acts whose effect depends on the concrete content of the individual books) resonates strongly in *The Doctor's Wife*. The suggestion of idleness in the

4 *OED*, definition of "tone".

5 This view of training versus relaxation informs Smiles's whole theory about the formation of habits, described vividly in another passage (not just concerning reading, but habits in general): "temptation will come to try the young man's strength; and once yielded to, the power to resist grows weaker and weaker. Yield once, and a portion of virtue has gone. Resist manfully, and the first decision will give strength for life; repeated, it will become a habit. It is in the outworks of the habits formed in early life that the real strength of the defence must lie; for it has been wisely ordained, that the machinery of moral existence should be carried on principally through the medium of the habits, so as to save the wear and tear of the great principles within" (Smiles 1897: 303).

6 Another example of the use of the "reading as consumption" metaphor around the time of the novel's production can be found in Alfred Austin's essay "The Vice of Reading" (1874), which hinges on the notion that reading has gone out of control in contemporary English society: "we are unable to dispel the conviction that reading, so long a virtue, a grace, an education, and, in its effects, an accomplishment, has become a downright vice – a vulgar, detrimental habit, like dram-drinking; an excuse for idleness; not only not an education in itself, but a stumbling-block in the way of education; a cloak thrown over ignorance; a softening, demoralising, relaxing practice, which, if persisted in, will end by enfeebling the minds of men and women, making flabby the fibre of their bodies, and undermining the vigour of nations" (Austin 1874: 251).

passage introducing Isabel is strikingly complemented with metaphors of con-sumption: Sigismund describes the books she reads as "beautiful sweet-meats, with opium inside the sugar" (TDW 24). The image is reiterated and elaborated in a narratorial commentary later on in the novel: "She [Isabel, when reading] was satisfied as an opium-eater is satisfied with the common everyday world; which is only the frame that holds together all manner of splendid and ever-changing pictures. She was content with a life in which she had ample leisure to dream of a different existence" (TDW 118). The parallels to Smiles's imagery are obvious: the comparisons of novels to unhealthy, even addictive substances serve to charac-terize reading as a ruinous habit.[7]

The gendering of the idle reader as female in *The Doctor's Wife* seems to suggest that the novel mounts an attack against women readers in particular. The emphasis on the disarray of the garden, which is preceded by a detailed descrip-tion of the cluttered Sleaford house, serves to juxtapose the woman reader with the angel in the house, who quietly but busily upholds order in the domestic sphere. Clearly, Isabel fails to meet the standards of this idealized image of femininity. In a later passage, Mrs. Sleaford, Isabel's stepmother, evokes precisely this model as a standard: she "thought that she had said all that was to be said about Isabel when she had denounced her as a lazy selfish thing, who would loll on the grass and read novels if the house was blazing and her family perishing in the flames" (TDW 115).

However, it is precisely such an explicit condemnation of Isabel by an unsympathetic character (Mrs. Sleaford herself spectacularly fails to live up to her own standards) that may be counted as one indicator that this negative evalua-tion is by no means the novel's final word on female reading in particular, or on novel reading in general. Like Lennox, Braddon taps into a tradition of clichés about the female reader in order to complicate them. Her novel introduces the stereotypical image of the lazy, selfish woman reader only to then question it on various levels that I will explore in the following sections. *The Doctor's Wife* focuses on the thoughts and emotions of the idle reader in order to explore reading as a socially embedded practice – and in particular, to complicate the evaluation of reading as a pleasure-seeking activity.

The garden scene also introduces a second theme that represents a certain kind of reading as a bad habit: the image of the reader as lascivious. Many of the details in this passage are sexually suggestive: (again) the lazily "lolling" posture – not only in a basket chair, but, as the repetition clarifies, a "low" basket chair, which suggests that Isabel is almost lying down – the "tumbled" dress, the

---

7 On the new discourses on addiction in the nineteenth century, see Zieger (2011).

straggling hair, the exposed throat. The description thus evokes a particular tradition of depictions of the female reader which, in literature as well as painting, link reading and (female) sexual desire. This connection is epitomized in Antoine Wiertz's famous painting *La liseuse de romans* (1853), in which a naked woman is sprawled on a bed, engrossed in and excited by the contents of the volume she is holding in her hand.[8]

The connection between reading and sexuality is crucial to the plot development of *The Doctor's Wife* as a whole, since until the last quarter of the book it looks as if Isabel's infatuation with romantic fiction will propel her into an extramarital affair. Braddon thus sets Isabel up as an English counterpart to Flaubert's Emma Bovary. In contrast to *Madame Bovary*, however, *The Doctor's Wife* depicts a protagonist who at the critical moment refuses to commit adultery. This may be read as a reinforcement of a moral code restricting both female desire and the representation of sexuality in fiction. But this is by no means all that can be said about the different trajectories of the plots in these novels. As I will argue in detail in the following sections, the particular trajectory of Isabel's desire is an integral part of the novel's exploration of reading for pleasure.

Like *The Female Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey*, *The Doctor's Wife* also juxtaposes different perspectives by and on the reading subject and thus foregrounds the problem of an evaluation of reading. The garden scene can once again serve as an example: as Catherine Golden (2003: 106–107) points out, the very physical description of Isabel's pose "anticipates" that of the reading woman in Winslow Homer's watercolour painting *The New Novel* (1877), which also displays the reading woman's body for inspection and "suggest[s] seductiveness and sexual availability". The sexualized imagery in the passage thus might be taken to indicate the dubious moral position of the pleasure-seeking reader. The way in which the scene is set up, however, raises the question of the instance to which a sexual interpretation of the scene can be attributed. Isabel herself is "so absorbed by the interest of the page before her that she did not even lift her eyes when the two young men went close up to her". Rather than consciously exposing herself to the male gaze, the female reader is oblivious to the fact that she is being watched at all. *Her* attention (and possibly desire) is focussed on the page, not the world around her. The description of her body and her clothes, then, could be seen as replicating the male gaze of the two young men who enter the garden. This impression is reinforced by the fact that later on in the scene, George, the main reflector figure in this chapter, is described as being captivated by Isabel's beauty. However, by emphasizing a few negative details that the smitten George

---

8 See the analysis of this painting in Stewart (1996: 82–86).

himself presumably does not notice, such as her smudged dress, or the unhealthy colouring of the throat, the authorial narrator here seems to criticize Isabel's lack of social decorum and guardedness.[9] The hints of sexual desire that pervade this scene are thus not easily assignable: is the desire at least partly Isabel's? Or only George's? Or is it a reading stance projected for the actual recipient of the text, who is invited to picture the attractive image Isabel presents to a male spectator and at the same time is reminded that this spectacle is somewhat disreputable? This shuffling of perspectives, in any case, foreshadows ways in which the novel engages with and complicates the stereotypical image of the licentious reader.

Isabel Sleaford and Emma Bovary

In a letter to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Braddon both acknowledges and distances herself from the direct model for *The Doctor's Wife*, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*: "The idea of the Doctor's Wife *is* founded on 'Madame Bovary' the style of which book struck me immensely in spite of it's [sic] *hideous* immorality".[10] The parallels to Flaubert's novel are indeed obvious: both works centre on the life of a country doctor's wife, and both break with the established model of the marriage plot by representing the wedding not as a happy ending but as the beginning of a series of disappointments and betrayals. Moreover, both place strong emphasis on the psychological assessment of their heroines' development, using free indirect discourse and narratorial commentary. Last but not least, both represent the reading of fiction as playing an important role in this development – Emma Bovary is arguably the best-known female quixotic reader in Western literary

---

9 Keeping in mind the connections Thomas Laqueur (2004: 302–358) has pointed out between the anxieties concerning novel reading and those concerning masturbation, one might even argue that the scene evokes the idea of reading as being sexually titillating to the reader herself and thus contributes to casting Isabel in an even more problematic light (at least from the point of view of the sexual mores of her time). As Laqueur writes on the interconnections between masturbation and print culture: "the solitary vice was where literature both as a practice – writing and more often private reading – and as content could lead if it were not civilized. Pornography was the sign of uncontrolled content, masturbation of excessive self-absorption, imagination, and solitude. In other words, masturbation becomes a problem, because aspects of print culture become a problem, and this happens because the dangerous dark side of the much-extolled imagination and fantasy, of the capacity of always wanting more, and of the newly created realm of the private is solipsism, selfishness, and complete moral collapse. Civilization depended, in short, on what it also feared" (2004: 303).
10 Letter to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, not dated (summer 1864), Wolff 1974: 22.

history. As Margaret Cohen sums it up, Emma is represented as "a woman who has read too many novels and seeks the dramas of fiction amid the banality of everyday life" (Cohen 2005: ix). This description would work equally well for Braddon's novel reader.

It would not, however, adequately encapsulate the quixotic plots of Lennox's and Austen's works. The comparison helps to grasp important ways in which both mid-nineteenth-century novels differ from their predecessors: neither of the two earlier protagonists is represented as primarily motivated by the wish to 'seek drama' in order to invigorate their commonplace everyday lives. *The Doctor's Wife* and *Madame Bovary* are more psychologically oriented than their predecessors insofar as both these works are centrally and explicitly concerned with the role reading plays in the development of their main characters' desires. Both novels chart the ways in which desire is reflected, channelled, and even transformed by fictional reading. They also show how it conflicts with the social context in which the protagonists are situated. This focus entails a new kind of quixotic reader: not one who is a flawed model because she is naïve and/or misreads, but one who defies the category of 'model of conduct', whose moral shortcomings and unappealing character traits are explored in depth.

There are also important differences between Isabel Sleaford and Emma Bovary, and more generally between the two novels, starting with the obvious divergences in the plot: while Emma whole-heartedly embraces adultery and gets so tangled up in a web of lies and deception that she finally sees no other way out than to kill herself, Isabel rejects Roland – and survives. Over the last 150 years, Braddon has been both praised and criticized for 'bowdlerizing' Flaubert by having Isabel shy away when Roland wants to turn their meetings into an actual affair and suggests that they run away to Europe. Notably, Margaret Oliphant, in her 1867 review, comments that the novel's "plagiarism was so far perfectly allowable that it clearly defined wherein the amount of licence permitted by English taste differs from that which comes natural to the French" (Oliphant 1867: 263). This comment encapsulates the view that Braddon's ending reflected the notion of the superiority of English morals to the supposed moral laxity of the French. Other and especially later readers, though interpreting Braddon's decision to omit explicit references to female physical desire and to the act of adultery itself as dictated by the sensibilities of her countrymen, have evaluated this decision in negative terms, seeing it as an aesthetic failure or unnecessary prudishness. Even one of Braddon's greatest champions in the twentieth century, Robert Lee Wolff, dismisses Isabel's character in the Roland episodes as "*preternaturally* innocent and bland" (Wolff 1979: 163, emphasis mine). Peter Edwards follows this cue by arguing that it is unconvincing that despite her knowledge about and empathy with fallen women in literature, Isabel

should be unprepared for Roland's suggestion that she become his mistress (see Edwards 2008: 116).[11]

However, the differences between Emma and Isabel are far more interesting than the view of Isabel as a stunted version of Emma allows for. In both novels, reading becomes an imaginary escape from a social life that is seen as unsatisfactory, and a way of negotiating relations with society – but with rather different implications. Each novel drafts its own version of the protagonist's inner life, and, as I will argue in the following two sections, Isabel's failure to anticipate Roland's proposal is consistent with the sophisticated outlook on reading as a cultural practice that is represented in *The Doctor's Wife*.

Lyn Pykett sums up the main difference in the characterization of the two women by describing Emma as a "sensualist who craves material luxury" (1998: xiii) and for whom "love is always linked to lust and luxury" (ibid.: xiv). Isabel's desire, on the other hand, is represented as "altogether more ethereal" (ibid.): she is more interested in the aesthetic, a character trait that manifests itself in her love of the poetic aspects of her books (ibid.: xiii). My own reading takes Pykett's insight as a point of departure. Flaubert, I argue, establishes a psychologically complex model of the role of reading in the development of his main character which in Braddon' novel is adapted and modified for specific, and in some ways rather different, purposes.

The role of fictional reading in Emma Bovary's life is established by a narrative with a tripartite structure: first, there is a childhood period in which fictional scenarios give shape to as yet unformed desires. The second stage is dominated by a contrast between the idea of passionate love as the highest ideal of individual fulfilment in the stories Emma has read and her own disillusioning experience of her marriage as failing to kindle any sort of passion. Finally, in the third stage, Emma tries to reshape her actual life according to her reading by having affairs outside her marriage – attempts that gratify her for short periods of time but ultimately lead to her downfall.

---

11 Braddon's own comment on the "*hideous* immorality" of Flaubert's novel in the letter to Bulwer-Lytton quoted above seems to suggest that she herself strongly disapproved of the way he represented adultery. However, maybe one should not attach too much significance to this phrase. As Edwards points out, Braddon tended to cater to Bulwer-Lytton's old-fashioned views when writing to him (2008: 116), and to my eye the emphasis on 'hideous' makes it look as if she is protesting too much. In a later article on "Émile Zola and the Naturalistic School, or Realism in French Literature", written in 1885 but not published, Braddon characterized *Madame Bovary* as "the very mildest of improper stories, which seems to exhale an atmosphere of buttermilk or curds and whey as compared with the reeking odours of vitriol and sang de boeuf which pervade the novels of M. Émile Zola" (quoted in Wolff 1979: 318).

The first stage comprises Emma's childhood education at a convent, where leisure reading has a much greater impact on her than the official parts of her education. She secretly reads romance novels that are smuggled into the convent by an old maid, and is interested mainly in the stock elements of romance:

> They [the books Emma liked] were all about love, lovers, sweethearts, persecuted ladies fainting in lonely pavilions, postilions killed at every relay, horses ridden to death on every page, somber forests, heart-aches, vows, sobs, tears and kisses, little boatrides by moonlight, nightingales in shady groves, gentlemen brave as lions, gentle as lambs, virtuous as no one ever was, always well dressed, and weeping like fountains. (MB 32)[12]

What is emphasized is that Emma's reading is a goal-oriented activity: as Ulrich Mölk (1986: 221–226) points out, Emma consciously uses books to evoke and enjoy specific kinds of emotions. Reading, then, is not represented as disinterested (as, for example, in the case of Arabella), but in terms of immediate gratification: "She had to gain some personal profit from things and she rejected as useless whatever did not contribute to the immediate satisfaction of her heart's desires – being of a temperament more sentimental than artistic, looking for emotions, not landscapes" (MB 32).[13]

That Emma's reading is closely linked to her self-centredness becomes apparent in the passage that describes the way in which she adapts the religious aspects of convent life:

> When she went to confession, she invented little sins in order that she might stay there longer, kneeling in the shadow, her hands joined, her face against the grating beneath the whispering of the priest. The comparisons of betrothed, husbands, celestial lover, and eternal marriage, that recur in sermons, stirred within her soul depths of unexpected sweetness. (MB 32)[14]

---

12 "Ce n'étaient qu'amours, amants, dames persécutées s'évanouissant dans des pavillons solitaires, postillons qu'on tue à tous les relais, chevaux qu'on crève à toutes les pages, forêts sombres, troubles du cœur, serments, sanglots, larmes et baisers, nacelles au clair de lune, rossignols dans les bosquets, messieurs braves comme des lions, doux comme des agneaux, vertueux comme on ne l'est pas, toujours bien mis, et qui pleurent comme des urnes" (Flaubert 1972: 58–59).

13 "Il fallait qu'elle pût retirer des choses une sorte de profit personnel; et elle rejetait comme inutile tout ce qui ne contribuait pas à la consommation immédiate de son cœur –, étant de tempérament plus sentimentale qu'artiste, cherchant des émotions et non des paysages" (Flaubert 1972: 58).

14 "Quand elle allait à confesse, elle inventait de petits péchés afin de rester là plus longtemps, à genoux dans l'ombre, les mains jointes, le visage à la grille sous le chuchotement du prêtre. Les comparaisons de fiancé, d'époux, d'amant céleste et de mariage éternel qui reviennent dans les sermons lui soulevaient au fond de l'âme des douceurs inattendues" (Flaubert 1972: 57).

Emma extends the joy of reading by staging herself in certain poses she associates with her sentimental works. For one thing, this suggests that she reads (and enjoys) *religious* texts in accordance with the scripts she takes from her romance reading – in the court case against Flaubert, this passage was singled out for its fusion of the religious and the sensual, and cited as an instance of the book's offense against "religious morality" (Pinard 2005: 318–19). It also shows that Emma's enjoyment centrally involves casting herself in a role, thus imagining that somebody else might see her as a romantic heroine. As Stephen Heath (1992: 69) points out, through such romantic gestures Emma later seeks to "achieve her difference" from the petit-bourgeois society around her – an ambition that manifests in her extravagant spending. In a sense, this is futile, as nobody recognizes these gestures (ibid.). However, they are crucial for her own self-image. Her posing overrides the experience of spontaneous and (at least according to conventional standards) more 'natural' emotion, as for example in the passage that describes Emma's reaction to her mother's death. She is "secretly pleased" when others think she is overcome by grief, and goes through the motions of mourning almost mechanically: "She soon grew tired but wouldn't admit it, continued from habit first, then out of vanity, and at last was surprised to feel herself consoled, and with no more sadness at heart than wrinkles on her brow" (MB 34).[15] Emma, then, is not a particularly innocent or disinterested reader in the first place.

The second stage of Emma's development as a reader charts her disillusionment with her marriage and her idealizing of sexual passion. Here it becomes clear that for her, the vision of romantic fulfilment she has taken from her books is fused with physical, sexual desire. Her growing dissatisfaction with her marriage is depicted in sexual terms, as a lack of enthusiasm about the husband's advances: "sometimes he gave her great sounding kisses with all his mouth on her cheeks, or else little kisses in a row all along her bare arm from the tip of her fingers up to her shoulder, and she put him away half-smiling, half-annoyed, as one does with a clinging child."[16] The passage ends with a pointed reference to her childhood reading: "And Emma tried to find out what one meant exactly in

---

15 "Elle s'en ennuya, n'en voulut point convenir, continua par habitude, ensuite par vanité, et fut enfin surprise de se sentir apaisée, et sans plus de tristesse au cœur que de rides sur son front" (Flaubert 1972: 61).

16 "[Q]uelquefois, il lui donnait sur les joues de gros baisers à pleine bouche, ou c'étaient de petits baisers à la file, tout de long de son bras nu, depuis le bout des doigts jusqu'à l'épaule; et elle le repoussait, à demi souriante et ennuyée, come on fait à un enfant qui se pend après vous" (Flaubert 1972: 55).

life by the words *bliss, passion, ecstasy*, that had seemed to her so beautiful in books" (MB 30).[17]

"Virtue" in the second stage becomes a stance in Emma's self-fashioning. She is tempted to begin an affair with the young clerk Leon, whom she knows to be in love with her, but decides to reject him:

> What restrained her was, no doubt, idleness and fear, as well as a sense of shame. She thought that she had repulsed him too much, that the time was past, that all was lost. Then, pride, the joy of being able to say to herself, 'I am virtuous,' and to look at herself in the mirror striking resigned poses, consoled her a little for the sacrifice she thought she was making. (MB 90)[18]

Emma's "sense of shame" here does not seem to spring from any moral problems with deceiving her husband but from a sexually charged fear of being rejected. The idea of "virtue" is satisfying not because she thinks she has done the right thing but because it allows her to adopt yet another pose. As Cohen points out in a note in the *Norton Critical Edition* of *Madame Bovary*, that pose can, just like that of the passionate lover, be traced to a literary model: Emma here "flirts with the role of a heroine from sentimental fiction, who struggles to sacrifice her love out of duty to uphold the principles of the social collective" (MB 90). Not unlike Miss Glanville in *The Female Quixote*, Emma is interested in 'virtue' as a social convention that can be exploited rather than as a moral standard.

The third stage, in which Emma tries to attain her romance ideal by breaking with social convention, at first shows her in a more passive role: she is seduced by Rodolphe Boulanger. The episode, however, culminates in a momentary experience of triumph. According to the conventional plots of sentimental fiction, the moment after the first extramarital sexual encounter, after the physical desire itself has been satisfied, would be the time for remorse and anxiety. For Emma, however, it is the opposite:

> She repeated: 'I have a lover! a lover!' delighting at the idea as if a second puberty had come to her. So at last she was to know those joys of love, that fever of happiness of which she had despaired! She was entering upon a marvellous world where all would be passion, ecstasy, delirium. She felt herself surrounded by an endless rapture. A blue space surrounded her

---

17 "Et Emma cherchait à savoir ce que l'on entendait au juste dans la vie par les mots de félicité, de passion et d'ivresse, qui lui avaient paru si beaux dans les livres" (Flaubert 1972: 55).

18 "Ce qui la retenait, sans doute, c'était la paresse ou l'épouvante, et la pudeur aussi. Elle songeait qu'elle l'avait repoussé trop loin, qu'il n'était plus temps, que tout était perdu. Puis l'orgueil, la joie de se dire: 'Je suis vertueuse', et de se regarder dans la glace en prenant des poses résignées, la consolait un peu du sacrifice qu'elle croyait faire" (Flaubert 1972: 157).

and ordinary existence appeared only intermittently between these heights, dark and far away beneath her.

Then she recalled the heroines of the books that she had read, and the lyric legion of these adulterous women began to sing in her memory with the voice of sisters that charmed her. She became herself, as it were, a part of these lyrical imaginings; at long last, as she saw herself among those lovers she had so envied, she fulfilled the love-dream of her youth. Besides, Emma felt a satisfaction of revenge. How she had suffered! But she had won out at last, and the love so long pent up erupted in joyous outbursts. She tasted it without remorse, without anxiety, without concern. (MB 131)[19]

The idea of 'having won' transforms what could have been represented as a passive role into an experience of agency. The diegetic narratorial commentary in the last sentence explicitly evokes emotional states that would have been expectable by negating them. Ironically, Emma's feeling of sisterhood with the fictional women she has read about thus marks a moment in which she herself as a literary character becomes truly extraordinary: Flaubert tests the limits of moral acceptability for fiction at his time not only by portraying an adulterous affair in detail but also by envisaging a female protagonist who exults in her transgression, and does so in a vindictive way. This also involves turning on its head the ideal of the literary character as a model for moral behaviour: Emma's feeling of sisterhood is with the adulteresses.

It is one of the ironies of literary history that the traditional idea of fictional characters as models of virtue, which is called into question so thoroughly in the representation of Emma, was invoked as a main point by Antoine Sénard, the attorney defending Flaubert in the famous trial in which the author and his novel were accused of subverting public morality. Sénard (2005: 336) represented the book as a classical case of a cautionary tale: "incitement to virtue by the horror of vice":

---

19 "Elle se répétait: 'J'ai un amant! un amant!', se délectant à cette idée comme à celle d'une autre puberté qui lui serait survenue. Elle allait donc posséder enfin ces joies de l'amour, cette fièvre du bonheur dont elle avait désespéré. Elle entrait dans quelque chose de merveilleux où tout serait passion, extase, délire; une immensité bleuâtre l'entourait, les sommets du sentiment étincelaient sous sa pensée, et l'existence ordinaire n'apparaissait qu'au loin, tout en bas, dans l'ombre, entre les intervalles de ces hauteurs.

Alors elle se rappela les héroïnes des livres qu'elle avait lus, et la légion lyrique de ces femmes adultères se mit à chanter dans sa mémoire avec des voix de sœurs qui la charmaient. Elle devenait elle-même comme une partie véritable de ces imaginations et réalisait la longue rêverie de sa jeunesse, en se considérant dans ce type d'amoureuse qu'elle avait tant envié. D'ailleurs, Emma éprouvait une satisfaction de vengeance. N'avait-elle pas assez souffert! Mais elle triomphait maintenant, et l'amour, si longtemps contenu, jaillissait tout entier aves des bouillonnements joyeux. Elle le savourait sans remords, sans inquiétude, sans trouble" (Flaubert 1972: 230).

I can say that in this book the vices of education are brought to life, that they are taken from the true and living flesh of our society, and that with each stroke the author asks us this question: 'Have you done what you should for the education of your daughters? Have you given them that religion that can sustain them amidst in [sic] the storms of life, or is it merely a mass of carnal superstitions that leaves them without support when the thunder rumbles? Have you taught them that life is not the fulfilment of fanciful dreams and that it is something prosaic to which we must adapt ourselves?' (Sénard 2005: 381–382)

As the prosecutor in the trial rightly pointed out, however, *Madame Bovary* does not feature any character who could be seen as positively affirming such a view of morality (see Pinard 2005: 335). As the analysis of Emma's appropriation of her fictional reading has demonstrated, Flaubert does not make his protagonist appear as merely an "unfortunate woman" who is led on the wrong path by education "above the station in which she is born" (Sénard 2005: 362; 339). Instead, he endows her with qualities that are highly prized from the vantage point of a romantic understanding of the subject as rebelling against bourgeois convention: dedication, vitality, audacity.[20] The scene that shows Emma after the first sexual encounter with Boulanger is in this sense programmatic, as was not lost on the prosecution in the trial: "Thus from that first error, from that first fall on, she glorifies adultery, she sings adultery's hymn of praise, its poetry and its sensual delights. That, gentlemen, is to me *far more serious, far more immoral* than the fall itself!" (Pinard 2005: 323, emphasis mine).

From Charles Baudelaire onwards, who finds "real greatness" in her character (2005: 409), readers have been impressed by Emma's uncompromising pursuit of her idea of happiness (see e.g. Cohen 2005: ix). The representation of Emma as an unruly reader in *Madame Bovary* also entails a projection of novel reading as a practice that questions social agreements on moral codes.

Young Isabel and Reading as Compensation

In *The Doctor's Wife*, by comparison, the protagonist's pursuit of pleasure is represented as less rebellious and radical insofar as the issue of sexual transgression is played down. While Isabel Sleaford is hardly represented as a model of feminine virtue, her character is conceived of as less extraordinary than Emma's in that she does not consciously decide to overstep the boundaries of moral convention. Nonetheless, Isabel's reading, like Emma's, is described as a process

---

20 For a detailed discussion of the clash of different concepts of the ideal subject in the nineteenth century, see Reckwitz (2006: 204–242).

of active appropriation that is designed to compensate for disappointments in her real life. In its exploration of these processes as part of a fairly ordinary reader's life, Braddon's novel anticipates a view of novel reading as it is developed in Janice Radway's study *Reading the Romance* (already discussed in the introduction): like Radway, Braddon foregrounds the significance attached to the protagonist's reading as a type of behaviour that stands in a complex relation to a limiting social environment. Moreover, in comparison to *Madame Bovary*, *The Doctor's Wife* much more clearly depicts the protagonist's novel reading as a quest for a community of taste, as also envisaged in *Northanger Abbey*. What may at first sight look like a self-centred quest for gratification is thus, in a much more pronounced way than in Flaubert, characterized as also reflecting a desire for meaningful social interaction.

The Doctor's Wife follows Flaubert's model insofar as it also represents its heroine's pursuit of happiness as a process in several stages, in all of which fictional reading plays a central role. The present section focusses on the representation of Isabel's development as a reader in the first two stages: her youth, in which the patterns modelling her desires are established, and the period of early marriage, in which she experiences a disillusionment that in some ways is similar to Emma Bovary's. The following section, then, will focus on the love story with Roland Lansdell as an exploration of the consequences of Isabel's education as a reader.

The story of Isabel's reading starts with a flashback to her life as a young girl, before her courtship and marriage. As in *Madame Bovary*, this part describes the formative influence of romance patterns on the protagonist as a complex psychological process. Isabel is described as having "received that half-and-half education which is popular with the poorer middle classes" (TDW 27–28). She knows a little Italian and French, does some singing, piano-playing and painting, and is familiar with bits of modern history. At the age of sixteen, however, her formal education is over, and so she "set to work to educate herself by means of the nearest circulating library. She did not feed upon garbage, but settled at once upon the highest blossoms in the flower-garden of fiction" (TDW 28). While Emma Bovary turns to romance reading (forbidden in the convent where she is schooled) as a break from her studies, Isabel's reading is thus described as a project of self-improvement. It is supposed to compensate for the insufficient access to learning that is a consequence of her constrained economic situation and also her gender: "If there had been any one to take this lonely girl in hand and organise her education, Heaven only knows what might have been made of her; but there was no friendly finger to point a pathway in the intellectual forest, and Isabel rambled as her inclination led her" (TDW 29). The criticism of the educational system implicit in this narratorial commentary is reminiscent of the diagnosis in George

Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* (1860), in which the bright Maggie Tulliver is denied the benefits of the classical education that are wasted on her less intellectual brother Tom.

In accordance with her desire for self-improvement, Isabel is careful to select the works of respected contemporary authors – such as Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, for instance, or Dickens's *David Copperfield*. Nevertheless, she ends up reading those works for their inclusion of stock elements of romance fiction: the representation of strong emotions, heroines with tumultuous lives, and handsome heroes with wild tempers. For Isabel, these "heroes were impalpable tyrants, and ruled her life. She wanted her life to be like her books; she wanted to be a heroine, – unhappy perhaps, and dying early" (TDW 28). The drive for self-improvement thus metamorphoses into self-indulgence. Throughout the novel, there are many such shifts – Isabel's reading is represented as reflecting laudable as well as blameworthy impulses, and often a mixture of both. This ambivalent characterization contributes to a psychologically subtle and morally complex assessment of reading as a practice.

The repetition of the word "want" signals that Isabel herself is highly aware of the categorical difference between the fictional world about which she reads and the society around her: "Poor Izzie's life was altogether vulgar and commonplace, and she could not extract one ray of romance out of it, twist it as she would" (TDW 29). Her actual life is governed by the mundane, by "having to mend awkward three-cornered rents in her brothers' garments, and being sent to fetch butter in the Walworth road" (TDW 29). Isabel's identification with the heroines of her books is thus clearly marked as a dream or desire rather than a perception of her actual situation. She casts her future self in a variety of different heroic poses that are obviously far removed from her lived reality. One moment she "had an especial desire to die early, by consumption, with a hectic flush and an unnatural lustre in her eyes" (TDW 28); the next, she imagines being swept up and married by a duke, and "wear[ing] ruby velvet and a diamond coronet ever after" (TDW 31). In contrast to Arabella and Catherine, Isabel *consciously* uses the fiction she reads for an imaginary escape from her confined circumstances.

While this consciousness of the specific attractions of fictional reading aligns Isabel with Emma Bovary, there are also major differences. In particular, there is no indication that Isabel knowingly uses reading to manipulate her own emotions and that for her, striking dramatic poses replaces real feeling. Isabel's pleasure in reading lies in the complete, if momentary, immersion in a different world. The focus on the circumstances in which she establishes this habit suggests an ambivalent attitude towards the notion of 'escape' through reading. In her discussion of the self-representation of real-life romance readers, Radway (1991: 61–62) describes the double-edged connotations of this notion: while it is often under-

stood in negative terms, as an avoidance of duties or responsibilities (as the term 'escapism' usually suggests), it can also be regarded as a positive effect, as attaining some kind of freedom.[21] In *The Doctor's Wife*, Isabel's immersion in her books is represented as 'escape' in both senses. The analysis of Isabel as an idle reader has already suggested that the novel both evokes and complicates the notion of reading as an avoidance of duties. The more positive view of Isabel's reading as an escape is, in the early stages of her development, mostly advocated by an emphasis on how limited Isabel's options are. In particular, the novel is very critical of the notion of housework as a pinnacle of female self-fulfilment. Isabel's aversion to the drudgery involved in her everyday life is presented in strikingly sympathetic terms. Although her incompetence with regard to house-hold work is a feature that makes her seem impractical, this impracticality is at the same time represented almost as a badge of honour, as it suggests that Isabel is interested in things that are indeed more worthwhile.

This assessment is even explicitly voiced by one of the characters, the benevolent Mr Raymond, who remarks upon Isabel's capacity for greater things: "[t]hat girl has mental imitation, – the highest and rarest faculty of the human brain –, ideality, and comparison" (TDW 82). Raymond also muses that "after all, these bright faculties might not be the best gifts for a woman. It would have been better, perhaps, for Isabel to have possessed the organ of pudding-making and stocking-darning, if those useful accomplishments are represented by an organ" (ibid.). This passage is reminiscent of Jane Eyre's famous speech about the unfairness of women's consignment to private and passive lives.[22] Isabel's attempt to escape from a world in which the darning of stockings constitutes the height of female achievement is here presented as an understandable desire for freedom from petty constraints.

In keeping with the novel's representation of Isabel as a mixed character, however, reading as the expression of an understandable wish for a better life has

---

21 See also Flint (1993: 32), who remarks on the positive potential of escape through reading: "in the nineteenth century, escape might be into a world which would free the woman reader from the immediate and particular pressure to live up to such ['feminine'] values".

22 Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (2001 [1847]: 93): "It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. [...] Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded of their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex."

some negative consequences. *The Doctor's Wife* takes up one of the central ideas of *The Female Quixote*, namely that the contents of novels can foster false expectations. This problem is closely explored in the episode which marks Isabel's transition to the second stage of her development as a reader: George Gilbert's marriage proposal. Seen from a pragmatic point of view, George's proposal is a stroke of luck, as it comes at a time when her family's financial situation has forced Isabel to accept a position as governess and has also greatly diminished her prospects of finding a husband. The passage describing the proposal is a good example of the psychologically nuanced way in which Isabel's reading-induced mistakes are described:

> 'This is what it is to be a heroine,' she thought, as she looked down at the coloured pebbles […] and yet knew all the time, by virtue of feminine second-sight, that George Gilbert was gazing at her and adoring her. She didn't like *him*, but she liked him to be there talking to her. […] Any other good-looking respectably-dressed young man would have been quite as much to her as George Gilbert was. But then she did not know this. It was so easy for her to mistake her pleasure in the 'situation;' the rustic bridge, the rippling water, the bright spring twilight, even the faint influence of that one glass of sparkling Burgundy, and above all, the sensation of being a heroine for the first time in her life – it was so terribly easy to mistake all these for that which she did not feel, – a regard for George Gilbert. (TDW 89)

Isabel, clearly, is no Arabella who simply takes fictional for factual models. To be a 'heroine', for her, carries none of the moral significance it does for Arabella. The way in which Isabel regards the moment in terms of generic romance patterns – rather than considering the actual real-life relationship between herself and George – shows her emotional immaturity. At the same time, the explicit characterization of Isabel in the diegetic commentary ("But then she did not know this.") can be seen as a plea for sympathy, as it suggests that Isabel is not motivated by calculation or arrogance. Her pleasure in the situation is represented as both understandable and wrong-headed.

On some level, Isabel herself is aware of the vast difference between her fiction-induced fantasies and actual married life. In the early days of her marriage, she even seems to be willing to give up her romantic ideals:

> [S]he was content to sacrifice the foolish dreams of her girlhood, which were doubtless as impossible as they were beautiful. She was content to think that her lot in life was fixed, and that she was to be the wife of a good man, and the mistress of an old-fashioned house in one of the dullest towns in England. (TDW 103)

The negative value judgments in the last part of the sentence already foreshadow Isabel's failure to follow her own good intentions. What is even more interesting, however, is that they also subtly work against the idealization of marriage as an institution. There is a perceptible evaluative shift from "she was to be the wife of a

good man" to "the mistress of an old-fashioned house in one of the dullest towns in England". The former can be read as an instance of free indirect discourse without irony, as evoking Isabel's good intentions at this stage as much as an endorsement on the part of the authorial narrator. In the second part, however, the positive evaluation is replaced by a negative judgement of George, which clearly clashes with the introductory "she was content to think". The negative judgement ("old-fashioned house", "one of the dullest towns in England") cannot easily be attributed to Isabel, who at this point in the story is represented as neither informed nor self-confident enough to pronounce them, even to herself. As a diegetic commentary, the assessment can be seen as part of a performance of authorship that oscillates between keeping an ironic distance to the character and sympathizing with her view of things – and that concomitantly invites corresponding reading stances.

Such characterizations of George and the life he offers recur in the narratorial commentaries both before and after this scene. Whenever George is described, the emphasis on his fundamental virtues (his good nature, his sobriety, his industry) is complemented by an emphasis on his limitations: his small-mindedness, his lack of imagination and empathic abilities.[23] He simply does not notice his wife's troubles: "He had married this girl because she was unlike other women; and now that she was his own property, he set himself conscientiously to work to smooth her into the most ordinary semblance of womanhood, by means of that moral flat-iron called common-sense" (TDW 116).

Isabel's intention to follow the script for the role of a dutiful Victorian wife – exemplified by her decision to abstain from novel reading in favour of needlework (TDW 106) – is thus represented as doomed because of her husband's as well as her own flaws. A scene that illustrates their incompatibility particularly well is the one in which Isabel suggests renovating the house and buying new furniture such as an ottoman and "chintz-curtains lined with rose-colour" (TDW 114). George refuses to follow any of her suggestions and shows that he has completely missed the point by promising to consider buying "a new Kidderminster carpet, – a nice serviceable brown ground with a drab spot, or something of that kind" (TDW 115) if his business as a doctor should continue to thrive. This constellation echoes the

---

23 The passage that introduces him, for example, ends thus: "he had those homely, healthy good looks which the novelist or poet in search of a hero would recoil from with actual horror, and which the practical mind involuntarily associates with tenant-farming in a small way, or the sale of butcher's meat" (TDW 6). The irony here has two targets: on the one hand, it is reminiscent of Jane Austen's parody of clichéd romance conventions in the first chapter of *Northanger Abbey* and suggests that George is a comparatively 'realistic' character. One the other hand, the second part of the sentence points to the limits of George's horizon and aspirations.

stereotype of the frivolous wife who wants to spend her husband's hard-earned money on luxuries. However, while the utilitarian view that backs up George's stance does to some extent seem valid, the idea that he offers an acceptable compromise appears ludicrous. The almost comical dreariness of his proposition ("drab" indeed seems like an apt description of the style of living in his house) elicits sympathy for Isabel's point of view. Her wish to redecorate is explicitly not characterized as materialistic but as the desire "to infuse some beauty into her life, something which, in however remote a degree, should be akin to the things she read of in her books" (TDW 115). Her ability to enjoy beautiful things appears as a noble and ennobling character trait, even though the sense of entitlement it engenders is presented as morally problematic.

At the end of the second stage in her development as a reader, Isabel returns to her reading habit. She reads at the dinner table (TDW 118); she goes on long country walks and brings books to read outside (TDW 117). This new degree of escapism is explained in psychological terms as a reaction to the realization that her marriage has been a "horrible and irreparable mistake" and that "she had bartered all the chances of the future for a little relief to the monotony of the present – for a few wedding-clothes, a card-case with a new name on the cards contained in it, the brief distinction of being a bride" (TDW 110). The subtle negotiations that take place during the honeymoon period – George's attempt to please his wife with a stay at a nice hotel, Isabel's willingness to change her habits – do not result in the desired formation of an intimate bond, but in the revelation of their incompatibility as a couple. In her cultural history of the honeymoon in the Victorian era, Helena Michie argues that its significance lies in arbitrating "the adjustment of self to [...] 'conjugality': the expectation not only that Victorian husbands and wives depended primarily on each other for support, affection, and interaction but that they defined themselves away from the birth family and the community and in terms of the conjugal couple" (Michie 2006: xv). In *The Doctor's Wife*, one aspect that is foregrounded is the complex negotiation of power that underpins this ostensibly mainly affect-oriented event (see e.g. the use of the word "bartered", which suggests that even the incurably romantic Isabel is on some level aware of the degree to which marriage is a matter of practical economics). The Gilberts fail to establish conjugality.

There is, at this stage, a winner in the exchange: George has established his rules for their life together and is oblivious of any need to negotiate further. By immersing herself in fictional worlds, Isabel once again taps into the only source of pleasure that is easily available to her. This is her escape not from the burden of housework and family care, as for the Midwest women Radway interviewed for her twentieth-century study, but from the boredom and solitude that is here represented as a typical result of the contemporary distribution of gender roles

(see TDW 116–117). That this sympathetic stance towards the position of the female reader stands in contrast to established public opinion becomes apparent in the passage which sums up the village people's view that "a young person who spent so much of her time in the perusal of works of fiction could scarcely be a model wife" (TDW 117).

There is a long gnomic commentary that suggests general conclusions that can be drawn from the particular case of Isabel and George and that describes the predicament of the married couple who "are only two separate creatures chained together" (TDW 107). The woman, a reader of French novels, "from the lonely heights amid which she dwells, looks down upon her husband with supremely contemptuous compassion; while he, looking up at her from the busy regions of this lower world, sees only a frivolous creature who neglects her household and runs long milliner's bills" (TDW 107). The main target of the irony here is neither the frivolity of the wife nor the boorishness of the husband but the inability of both spouses to understand the other's point of view – and their willingness to adopt a clichéd view instead. Their marriage is tainted by a crisis of communication, which in turn appears to be the result of the gendered division of the domestic and the public spheres. While the validity of this distribution is not radically challenged in *The Doctor's Wife*, the novel does call for mutual respect and an attempt to mediate between the different positions. This critique of marriage in the earlier parts of the novel is important also for an evaluation of Isabel's reading in the later stages of her development, when her reading habit no longer merely replaces communication and companionship but becomes a way of supplying them.

Isabel and Roland: The Temptations of Companionship

In the second part of the novel, Isabel's infatuation with her books is transferred to a real-life person: when she meets the young and attractive local squire Roland Lansdell, she launches into a relationship that almost ends in full-blown adultery. These parts of the novel at first glance mainly seem to confirm anxieties about reading as promoting false expectations and licentiousness. Seen in the light of the findings of the previous section, however, they suggest that Isabel's main temptation may be the hope of companionship – not a companionship that is primarily sexual, but a kind that is close to the community of taste envisaged in *Northanger Abbey*.

The theme of an aesthetically oriented community is prominent in the scene in which Isabel and Roland first encounter each other. The Gilberts go on an

excursion to Warncliffe Castle, a location described as "the show-case of the county" (TDW 122), where one can take guided tours of the rooms and collections and admire the picturesque views. The protagonist feels as if a fictional scenario had come to life:

> Her dreams were all true then; there were such places as this, and people lived in them. Happy people, for whom life was all loveliness and poetry, looked out of those windows, and lolled in those antique chairs, and had caskets of Florentine mosaic [...] and a hundred objects of art and beauty [...] surrounding them on every side always. (TDW 125)

This passage once again suggests a fusion of aesthetic and materialistic interests. While the metamorphosis of the romantic castle into a tourist attraction seems designed to make Isabel's excitement about the luxuries on display appear superficial, her enjoyment is also explicitly linked to her love of beauty.

When Isabel first sees Roland, he appears to her like one of the art works she so admires in the castle:

> What did she see? A young man half reclining in the deep embrasure of a window, with the summer sunshine behind him, and the summer breezes fluttering his loose brown hair [...]. She saw a man upon whom beneficent or capricious nature, in some fantastic moment, had lavished all the gifts that men most covet and that women most admire. (TDW 127)

The identification of Roland with the realm of the aesthetic is also reinforced by the revelation that he is "the Alien", a poet in the Byronic vein, whose "melancholy rhapsodies" have become her favourite reading (TDW 120). Isabel is charmed by Roland's status as a squire as well as by his profession as a poet; she relishes the exquisite meal he serves at a luncheon (TDW 174) in the same way in which she enjoys the works of art at the castle. Clearly, for Isabel, the wish for a more luxurious style of life than the one that is offered by George is indistinguishable from the aesthetic pleasure afforded to her by beautiful sights.

That the budding relationship between Isabel and Roland is centred on reading reinforces this theme of the aesthetic. The characterization of their romance as "literary", as Pykett calls it (1998: xiv), marks it as more "ethereal" (ibid.) and thus suggests that it is in accordance with the characterization of Isabel as less driven by materialism and sensuality than Emma Bovary. Moreover, Isabel is represented as motivated by a desire for companionship – it has already been argued that she wants to escape from the isolated existence her marriage imposes upon her. In the relationship with Roland, it seems, books figure as social cement in a similar way as they do in Austen's novel: Roland starts lending books to Isabel in order to 'educate' her, and when they meet to go walking in the countryside, they often discuss literature or read together, as Catherine and Henry do in *Northanger Abbey*. In Roland, Isabel has found somebody who shares her enthu-

siasm for literature and professes an interest in her literary taste and sensibility. Even if Isabel's aesthetic preferences are portrayed as rather immature,[24] the *desire* for aesthetic stimulation, and for a companion to share it with, should be taken seriously. What Isabel longs for is a community of taste similar to the one Catherine Morland shares with the Tilneys.

However, this desire is itself illusory. The asymmetrical character of the relationship is much more strongly emphasized than in *Northanger Abbey* in that the 'teacher' Roland does not in fact have much esteem for Isabel's spirit or mind. While he concedes that she is more than just a "pretty automaton" (TDW 154), he does not take her seriously: "[t]hat pretty head was filled with a quaint confusion of ideas, half-formed childish fancies, which charmed and amused this elegant loiterer" (TDW 161). The sexual agenda connected with Roland's act of "pure philanthropy" is suggested in an instance of free indirect discourse that suggests an ironic distance to Roland's attitudes: "Was it not a good work rather than a harmful one to come now and then to this shadowy resting-place under the oak, and while away an hour or so with this poor little half-educated damsel, who had so much need of some sounder instruction than she had been able to glean, unaided, out of novels and volumes of poetry?" (TDW 185). Roland's notion of literary education seems like a rather flimsy excuse for a kind of intimacy that he himself suspects to be "harmful".

In contrast to Emma Bovary, who delights in adultery as a transgressive act that puts her beyond the pale of social convention, Isabel does not dwell on the implications of her encounters with Roland. She thinks of him all day, but the relationship retains a fictional quality: "It was better than reading, to sit through all the length of a hot August afternoon thinking about Roland Lansdell. What romance had ever been written that was equal to this story; this perpetual fiction, with a real hero dominant in every chapter?" (TDW 183). Moral considerations such as responsibility towards her husband do not enter into her views of the relationship, which to Isabel is an idealized (and of course chaste) Petrarchan romance, versions of which she has encountered in many of her books: "Why should I not worship him as Helena worshipped Bertram, as Viola loved Zanoni?" (TDW 261).

One of Isabel's greatest errors is to think that her commitment to a "perpetual fiction" is only her own private business that need not affect anybody else. This

---

24 "Isabel left the house affairs to Mrs Jeffson, and acted Shakespeare heroines and Edith Dombey before her looking glass, and read her novels, and dreamed her dreams, and wrote little scraps of poetry, and drew pen-and-ink profile portraits of Mr Lansdell – always looking from right to left" (TDW 156).

issue is clearly addressed in a diegetic narratorial commentary, in which the question of morality is explicitly raised:

> It was all very wicked of course, and a deep and cruel wrong to the simple country surgeon, who ate his dinner, and complained of the under-done condition of the mutton, upon one side of the table, while Isabel read the inexhaustible volume on the other. It was very wicked; but Mrs Gilbert had not yet come to consider the wickedness of her ways. She was a very good wife, very gentle and obedient; and she fancied she had a right to furnish the secret chambers of her mind according to her own pleasure. (TDW 183)

The passage has been read as an example of how the many lengthy diegetic and gnomic narratorial commentaries in the novel are "meant to reinforce [the text's] conventional morality and signal proper reader response" (Nemesvari 2011: 154).[25] This is, in fact, another way in which Braddon's work is often seen as contrasting with Flaubert's. Dominick LaCapra has influentially argued that Flaubert developed a new kind of narrative technique which creates "an indeterminacy of narrative voice that unsettles the moral security of the reader and renders decisive judgment about characters or story difficult to attain" (2005: 476). Nemesvari describes Braddon's use of commentary as "un-Flaubertian" (2011: 154), suggesting that because of its intrusiveness and explicitness it provides exactly the kind of moral security that Flaubert withholds.

At the same time, however, Nemesvari concedes that the many lengthy diegetic and gnomic narratorial commentaries in *The Doctor's Wife* in fact "often have a much more ambivalent effect" (ibid.) than dictating conventional moral messages. This, I want to argue, is yet another example of the complexities inherent in the authorial narration: the way in which authority claims are set up in the passage elicits a critical exploration rather than an acceptance of conventional moral certainties.

It is true that at first sight, the passage seems to reinforce a clear moral judgement: Isabel's behaviour is described as "wicked". I would argue, however, that it is precisely the use of intensifiers ("all very"; "of course") that complicates the impression of a straight-forward evaluation. The sentence as a whole dramatizes the judgement as a sweeping generalization: through the choice and repetition of the word "wicked" (which implies a moral depravity that is questioned in

---

25 For the one-volume stereotyped edition of *The Doctor's Wife* (published sometime after 1888, see note on the text in the Oxford World Classics Edition), many of the longer commentaries were shortened or deleted (Lyn Pykett records the changes in her edition, which renders the full text of the first three-volume edition published in 1864). I interpret this as pointing to a growing distaste for elaborate 'telling' in the late nineteenth century as it is described by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2004: ch. 1).

what follows), through the intensifier "very" and especially through the addition of "of course", which presupposes an obvious verdict that is directly contradicted by the subsequent references to Isabel's predicament. Then, in the next sentence, there is the directly conflicting assessment of Isabel as "a very good wife, very gentle and obedient". This is not ironic in the sense that it clearly means the opposite of what is said (i.e. she is not good, but wicked). Instead, the opposition of the two statements draws attention to the limits of such assessments: good or wicked according to whose standards? The idea that gentleness and obedience are the two characteristics that are required of a good wife can be attributed either to public opinion, to Isabel, or to George. On the one hand, it is a standard that may be seen as reflecting a problematic understanding of marriage on the part of Isabel: as long as she acts her part, she is not required to have any real feelings of attachment or responsibility. On the other hand, however, this definition of a "good wife" also outlines the problems with George's position: he is perfectly happy with the outward show of compliance on the part of his wife and does not even think to ask whether she is happy. It is implied, in any case, that this idea of 'goodness' is a rather reductive view, one that is more invested in appearances than in a person's real state of mind and moral disposition. The same, by inference, is true for the diametrically opposed judgement of 'wickedness'. The end of the passage thus poses a question that is left open. If the husband insists on obedience and has no interest in his wife's real feelings, does she not indeed have some right to "furnish the secret chambers of her mind according to her own pleasure"?

Rather than claiming that this narratorial commentary *reminds* an actual reader that it would be "proper" to be morally outraged at Isabel (thus "reinforc[ing] conventional morality" [Nemesvari 2011: 154]), I think one should more adequately describe it as *presupposing* this kind of evaluation, and then projecting a reading stance that carefully weighs different possible judgments. This is similar to the narrative technique employed in *Northanger Abbey*. The narrative commentary here also features what James Kim has labelled "sentimental irony" ('sympathetic irony' might be an even better term):[26] a kind of irony that does not primarily undermine characters but points to their limitations and highlights the complexities of their situations. The employment of sympathetic irony with

---

26 See the discussion of Kim's (2010) concept of "sentimental" (vs. satirical) irony in Sarah Fielding that I apply in the chapter on *Northanger Abbey*. My own suggestion of the term 'sympathetic' is based on Suzanne Keen's summary of the distinction between empathy and sympathy: "In empathy [...] we feel what we believe to be the emotions of others. This phenomenon is distinguished in both psychology and philosophy [...] from sympathy, in which feelings for another occur" (Keen 2007: 5).

regard to both Isabel and George in this passage makes the statement appear as the starting point, rather than the result, of a moral assessment: reading is projected here as the task of deciding whether "wicked" or "good" are indeed adequate labels for the doctor's wife. One purpose of novel writing, as implied by this performance of authorship, is to lay out a moral dilemma and to describe the ways in which this dilemma is generated by social structures.

To read in this way means to read in a much more sophisticated fashion than Isabel herself: if she extracts moral views from her books at all, they are black and white. This becomes clear in a passage which is the turning point in her affair with Roland. When he asks her to become his mistress and accompany him to Europe, Isabel realizes that she has misjudged their relationship:

> All her fancies about him had been so many fond and foolish delusions. He was not the true and faithful knight who could sit for ever at the entrance of his hermitage gazing fondly at the distant convent-casement, which might or might not belong to his lost love's chamber. No: he was quite another sort of person. He was the fierce dissolute cavalier, with a cross-handled sword a yard and a half long, and pointed shoes with long cruel spurs and steel chain-work jingling and clanking as he strode across his castle-hall. (TDW 277)

This passage, for one thing, confirms that Isabel, unlike Emma Bovary, is not at all willing to cross a line and step outside her marriage. Her refusal, however, is not staged as an echo of Lennox's view of Arabella's idealism: a victory of virtue, or an exercise in self-control. The new role in which Isabel casts Roland is obviously just as inadequate as the previous one: now she sees him as a rake. At the same time, she is plainly confused about her own motivations and desires. The reference to the long sword suggests an onslaught of sexual panic. This is also reinforced by the comment on the next page that she still admires Roland, but with "an awful shuddering horror" (TDW 278), an indication that she now thinks of herself as a Gothic-novel inspired damsel in distress.

Isabel's almost instantaneous switch from one plot to another suggests that the patterns she takes from literature do not directly determine her behaviour in the sense that they prompt a conscious emulation. Instead, they provide her with different ways of describing and justifying views and actions that are the result of many different factors, such as her social position, her conversations with others, and her emotional state. Like Lennox, then, Braddon highlights the interplay of the cognitive effects and the social embeddedness of reading. Where *The Doctor's Wife* differs from *The Female Quixote* is in its focus on the psychological effect of narrative patterns. Karen M. Odden argues that it is in a later novel, *John March-mont's Legacy*, that Braddon stages the notion that readers "think of life in terms of novelistic or theatrical structures, characters, and plots" (Odden 2004: 27). In my view, Isabel already represents an extreme example of this psychologized

notion of the impact of fictional stories on the way in which people understand their own lives. Isabel's sudden shift in her view of Roland foregrounds the close connection between patterns and plots encountered in fiction and the experience of the social world 'outside' of fiction, but it also suggests that this is not a predetermined or one-way relation.

At the end of the novel, the transformation of Isabel's "foolish youth" into "wiser womanhood" (TDW 402) is effected by the real sorrow felt over the loss of both her husband and Roland, who die rather suddenly. The contentment she feels despite these losses is attributed to her sense of feeling useful: she has a large inheritance, left by Roland, that she invests in reform projects to help the agricultural labourers in her village. That the effects of obsessive reading are as transitory as they are dramatic in *The Doctor's Wife* accords with its foregrounding of reading as a polyvalent practice that is closely tied to the mental, emotional and social state of the reader. It is the situation of the reader that shapes the practice, not the other way round. Nonetheless, reading – and in particular, novel reading – is represented as a central component of modern experience. It has become an integral part of life; it can afford a whole range of different pleasures, some more and some less socially sanctioned. This integration of novel reading as a central cultural practice is also reflected in the novel's specific employment of intertextual references.

Intertextuality Reloaded

Like all quixotic novels, *The Doctor's Wife* features and foregrounds different kinds of intertextuality. As a rewriting of *Madame Bovary*, as the previous sections have shown, it entails a re-evaluation of the quixotic figure and her propensity for reading. It highlights the psychological mechanisms involved in reading as well as the novel genre's special suitability for exploring the complex relations between individual and society. What is mostly absent from Braddon's novel is a kind of intertextuality that is central to both Lennox's and Austen's quixotic plots: there are almost no imitations of language or structure that are employed parodically. Unlike *The Female Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey*, *The Doctor's Wife* does not use parodic modes to set the stock features of romance against a more realistic description of their own protagonists' commonplace lives. However, Braddon's novel epitomizes a technique that is also prevalent in Austen's text: the use of explicit short references to concrete works of fiction in order to represent novel reading in general as an integral part of everyday experience.

That *The Doctor's Wife* takes this technique a step further than *Northanger Abbey* is already indicated by the sheer quantity of references. A substantial

portion of the twenty-six pages of explanatory notes in the back of the Oxford World's Classics edition is dedicated to explaining the allusions, many of which are to works popular during the time the book was written, such as Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1846–1848), *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Bleak House* (1852); Thackeray's *History of Henry Esmond* (1852) and *Pendennis* (1848–1850); Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Bulwer-Lytton's *The Caxtons* (1849). Many of these references are integrated at the level of the story: the books are represented as physical objects, as topics of conversation, but also and maybe even most importantly as an integral part of the central characters' daily lives. Everybody is a reader of fiction – even the unimaginative George Gilbert "had read Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott, and infinitely preferred the latter" (TDW 6).

Several critics have pointed out that a major function of some of these references is to call into question Isabel's reading of fiction and thus to remind the novel's actual readers of their responsibility to be more active and critical interpreters.[27] Readers are prompted, for example, to compare their own view of characters such as Dickens's Edith Dombey with Isabel's view of her "as a happy role model" (Pykett 1998: xvi).[28] Many passages achieve comic effects by showing Isabel's idiosyncratic ways of mining her books for romantic clichés, for example when she unfavourably compares her own uneventful engagement to George Gilbert with Jane Eyre's more turbulent biography: "Oh, to have been Jane Eyre, and to roam away on the cold moorland and starve – wouldn't *that* have been delicious!" (TDW 98). As with Lennox's Arabella, such references add a level of depth to the characterization of the protagonist because they illustrate how her mind works.

While Isabel is singled out for her naïve way of reading, she is by no means the only voracious reader in the novel. Mr Raymond, the author Sigismund Smith (who will be investigated more closely in the next section), and of course Roland Lansdell also fall into this category. Like Austen, Braddon thus conveys a sense of a society in which reading and talking about books is an integral part of everyday activity. This impression is heightened by the fact that many of the concrete references are extradiegetic, part of the authorial narrator's commentary rather than the conversation between the characters. There is, for example, a reference

---

27 This view was first put forward by Kate Flint, who suggests that the references encourage Braddon's readers to "enter into an active process of interpretation which invites recognition of their own active, rather than passive, role as readers" (1993: 283), and is echoed by Pykett and Golden.

28 See also Golden (2003: 110–111), who shows in some detail how obviously inadequate Isabel's interpretation is in light of Dickens's explicit descriptions of Edith's unhappiness in her marriage.

to Bulwer-Lytton's novel *The Caxtons*, framed as a reader address: "Do you remember how, when young Caxton's heart had been wrung by youth's bitterest sorrows, the father sends his son to the *Life of Robert Hall* [the biography of a Baptist minister] for comfort?" (TDW 235). A fictional reader (young Caxton) is treated here not only as a household name, but also as an illustrative example of the soothing effect of reading. This is an instance of self-reflexivity that does not foreground the fictionality of the text but rather suggests that the worlds and characters one reads about are integrated into the horizon of experience of contemporary readers of *The Doctor's Wife*. In turn, reading here is projected as an intimate exchange about familiar topics. Such references seem designed to intensify the sense of a shared cultural heritage: the actual reader is invited to regard him- or herself as part of a family in which fictional characters and their experiences are regarded as relevant points of moral experience.

There are many narratorial commentaries that similarly refer to fictional texts as sources of insights:

> Intensely subjective though our natures may be, external things will not be quite put away, strive as we may to shut them out. Did not Fagin think about the broken rail while he stood in the dock, and wonder who would mend it? Was not Manfred, the supremely egotistical and subjective, perpetually dragging the mountain-tops and Alpine streamlets into his talk of his own troubles? (TDW 346)

This passage nicely illustrates that the extrapolation of insights about human behaviour from fictional texts is not in itself criticized in *The Doctor's Wife*. On the contrary, what is suggested is that the representation of fictional characters allows for observations and generalizations that *can* usefully complement those gained from real-life experience. One of the main strengths of the novel as well as of poetry may lie in its ability to capture the complexities and even contradictions of human behaviour and thus to provide the attentive reader with templates to gauge his or her own reactions. The many intertextual references, then, can be seen as foregrounding the surplus value of such augmentations of experience, which is afforded by novel reading as well as by other cultural pursuits: besides novels, important points of reference include poetry, drama, opera, historical writing, and biography, as well as sculpture and painting. Reading novels is projected as entailing an education in the arts as well as in literature.

Terry Castle proposes that Ann Radcliffe in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* was "the first important English novelist to use poetic epigraphs, interpolated poems, and poetic fragments decoratively, as it were, for their suggestive mood-enhancing value" (1998: xiii). Castle sees this as a sign of the establishment of the novel genre in the late eighteenth century: it now incorporates samples from the pre-eminent genre of poetry, which are functionalized in a new context. While Castle

argues that this gesture serves to make the other genres look "obsolete or super-fluous" (ibid.), I would maintain that in *The Doctor's Wife* (and, I would argue, also in *Udolpho*), they are used in such a way that the cultural significance of the pretexts and the text incorporating them are mutually reinforced.

A central example of this is the use of references to poetry, which in *The Doctor's Wife* are included in the body of the text but also – as a particularly striking paratextual feature – in the chapter titles. In fact, 10 of the 37 titles feature quotations, mostly taken from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poetry: e.g. "I.XI, 'She only said, "My Life is weary!"'"; "II.IX, 'Once more the Gate behind me falls'"; "II.XIII, 'For Love himself took part against himself'"; "III.XII 'If any calm, a calm Despair'". Their sources are not attributed in the text, but the use of quotation marks foregrounds their special status as importations from other contexts. For one thing, this special status seems to be grounded in contrast: the subjective, emotional tone of these titles clashes with the more soberly descriptive character of other chapter titles, such as "I.IV The End of George Gilbert's Holiday", "I.X A Bad Beginning", and "III.XIII Keeping a Promise". This juxtaposition might suggest that the quotations featuring poetry introduce a romanticizing voice which serves to parody Tennyson – and to ridicule Isabel as a sentimental character who wants to regard her life in a poetic light. They appear to dramatize the emotional turmoil Roland and Isabel experience in their relationship and thereby give these episodes a melodramatic framing. Furthermore, they describe the characters' inner states in a kind of language that the naïve reader Isabel would surely enjoy. The mode of perceiving the world they represent seems to be discounted as illusionary.

At the same time, however, the 'poetic' titles provide a running commentary on the state of the relationship between Roland and Isabel that is largely con-gruent with the evaluation suggested in the narratorial commentary. The chapter titles do not, after all, emphasize the romantic *attraction* that is so important for Isabel but are rather used to chronicle and foreground the *problematic* character of the relationship and thus help to characterize the story as a cautionary tale. In this sense, these particular instances of romanticization do appear as apt summaries of the characters' situations. This is especially obvious in the case of the titles at the end of the novel: "III.X 'Twere best at once to sink in peace'" labels the chapter in which George Gilbert's death is described. This chapter features an affecting death bed scene and ends in two sentences that take up the sentiment of the title: "He [George] died supremely peaceful in the consciousness of having done his duty. He died, with Isabel's hand clasped in his own; and never, throughout his simple life, had one pang of doubt or jealousy tortured his breast" (TDW 368). The final title ("If any calm, a calm despair") also taken from Tenny-son's "In Memoriam", affects a similarly elegiac tone.

In sum, these titles are romanticizing in that they elevate their subjects and dramatize tumultuous emotions and in this sense provide a poetic prism which makes the events that are described seem more portentous. At the same time, they break with the characters' romantic illusions in that they foreshadow their collapse – and the rather unspectacular ending of the novel, in which Isabel lives a fairly content and economically secure life, doing good deeds with the money she has inherited from Roland. In this way, one could say, the novel fuses a romantic vision with down-to-earth practicality and moral responsibility.

The many intertextual references on the level of the discourse, then, predicate and enact a joint sphere of experience beyond direct social contacts. This sphere is governed by a sense of the aesthetic. It is envisaged as a cultural treasure that augments the first-hand perception of the social world and has the potential of enhancing both rational analysis and emotional response. By contrast, Isabel, with her limited experience both in her encounter with the world and with cultural artefacts, is not yet in a position to adequately employ these experiences. What is evoked as a desirable reading stance, then, is a balance between attentive discernment and emotional receptivity. The ideal of a community of taste is (to an even larger extent than is the case with Austen's novel) also extended to the novel's ideal audience. At the same time, however, *The Doctor's Wife* – as the next section will demonstrate – acknowledges and to some extent valorizes the diversity of expectations and tastes on the part of actual readers.

Sigismund Smith: Sensation Fiction and the Pleasures of Reading

While in *Northanger Abbey* it is mainly the "Defense of the Novel" that serves to reflect on the contemporary state of novel reading as an institutionalized practice, in *The Doctor's Wife* an entire strand of the plot is concerned with the literary market and the power structures that govern it. Aside from the quixotic reader Isabel, the novel features a second character whose life is defined by his relation to novels: the "sensation author" (TDW 11) Sigismund Smith, who is George Gilbert's school friend and a boarder at the Sleaford household. Sigismund's writing is wholly geared towards commercial success:

> Mr Sigismund Smith was the author of about half a dozen highly-spiced fictions, which enjoyed an immense popularity amongst the classes who like their literature as they like their tobacco – very strong. Sigismund had never in his life presented himself before the public in a complete form; he appeared in weekly numbers at a penny, and was always so

appearing; and except on one occasion when he found himself, very greasy and dogs-eared at the edges, and not exactly pleasant to the sense of smell, – on the shelf of a humble librarian and newsvendor, who dealt in tobacco and sweetstuff as well as literature, – Sigismund had never known what it was to be bound. (TDW 11)

In *The Reading Lesson* (1998), Patrick Brantlinger describes how the utilitarian view of literature as a mass-produced commodity constituted a matter of concern and critique in cultural circles of the mid-nineteenth century. He reads the Sigismund Smith plot as Braddon's strategy to deflect criticism that was often levelled at her own writing of 'sensation fiction'.[29] Brantlinger portrays Braddon as an early example of an increasing tendency among nineteenth-century writers to "capitulate to the desires of the mass reading public in a self-conscious manner that distinguishes [their writing] from earlier writing and publishing practices" (1998: 143). Through her descriptions of Sigismund Smith and his work (still according to Brantlinger), Braddon gives a derogatory account of her own commercial work as "inferior fiction for mass consumption" and at the same time shows a "patronizing contempt" for the readership that buys and enjoys these novels (ibid.: 163). This supposedly mirrors her fundamental uneasiness about the status of her own work. As Brantlinger sees it, Braddon foreshadows a more dramatic personality split of the self-loathing commercial author of the late nineteenth century that is exemplified in the works and correspondence of writers like George Gissing and Robert L. Stevenson (cf. ibid.: 166–191). Their attitude towards their own popular fiction, as Brantlinger sees it, is succinctly summarized in a sentence from one of Stevenson's letters: "There must be something wrong in me, or I would not be popular" (quoted ibid.: 173).

The class politics of novel reading that Brantlinger highlights are clearly visible in the above-cited passage introducing Sigismund, especially in the conspicuous use of the comparison between books and food or drugs. While in Isabel's case, the metaphor READING IS EATING is used to explore the transformative effect of her books, in this passage it has the effect of foregrounding Sigismund's pragmatic attitude towards his works. He sees his work as a commodity to be bought and consumed. The imagery is clearly class-coded: there is a sense of superiority towards a 'class of people' (elsewhere described as "a public that bought its literature in the same manner as its pudding – in penny slices" TDW 12), who like strong tobacco and who, like the instalments of Sigismund's

---

29 In the 1860s, "sensation fiction" was newly introduced as a derogatory term to describe works like Braddon's own *Lady Audley's Secret* (see Gilbert 2011b). In *The Doctor's Wife*, Braddon uses it self-consciously; she applies the label "sensation author" to Smith but immediately adds that "[t]hat bitter term of reproach [...] had not been invented for the terror of romancers in the fifty-second year of the present century" (TDW 11).

works, are regarded as likely to be greasy and smelly. Brantlinger's situating of Braddon's work in the larger context of nineteenth-century anxieties about moral degeneration associated with the working classes highlights how the worries about the novel as a commodity and the ambivalence about a novelist's obligation to cater to the tastes of his or her readership had changed since the eighteenth century. Popular fiction was now much more clearly associated with the working-class 'masses', and warnings about its proliferation often had at their root anxieties about the destabilization of boundaries between working and middle classes.

Brantlinger is not alone in reading Sigismund Smith as a caricature that helps Braddon to distance herself from the role of the 'sensation author' in which her contemporaries cast her. Nemesvari also sees Smith as a minor character whose insignificance to Isabel's story "marginalizes the literary form he represents, as does his frequent employment as light comic relief" (Nemesvari 2011: 151). The narratorial comment "This is *not* a sensation novel" (TDW 358) seems to confirm this view by cementing the difference between *The Doctor's Wife* and the kind of work that Braddon had become famous for, such as *Lady Audley's Secret*. Notably, however, the difference emphasized here is not between the kind of literature Isabel reads and *The Doctor's Wife* itself (as would be the typical quixotic pattern). It is explicitly stated that Isabel does not read sensation fiction (TDW 28). Ironically, however, Isabel consumes her more respectable novels in a way that is as harmful as the effects some of the critics of sensation literature imagined. What this seems to suggest is that every kind of literature has its legitimate uses – and can be abused by an obsessive reader.

The association of quixotic reading with respected types of novels calls into question the implications of the divide between serious and commercial literature that is evoked in *The Doctor's Wife*. While Braddon's novel does employ a class rhetoric to characterize commercial fiction, it also critically examines the established evaluations of this type of writing and the reading practices it elicits. This re-evaluation is to a large extent connected with the characterization of Sigismund – both Brantlinger and Nemesvari play down the extent to which he is described as sympathetic.

Sigismund is, I would argue, not primarily a target of ridicule himself; rather, his representation serves to criticize orthodoxies about the degenerative effect of writing and reading for entertainment. First of all, Sigismund's profession is not described in terms of alienating mass production for an anonymous market. He is no assembly-line worker but a no-nonsense craftsman: he "slapped his heroes into marketable shape, as coolly as a butterman slaps a pat of butter into the semblance of a swan or a crown, in accordance with the requirements of his customers" (TDW 28). This image of an artisan who aims to please the customer

with his product may clash with the image of the author as an inspired romantic genius, but it also stresses his skill and his success in customizing his product for the intended audience. If Sigismund's main function was to stand for a cliché of the commercial writer from which Braddon wanted to distance herself, one would expect him to be depicted either as a cynical salesman, taking advantage of his undiscriminating 'customers', or as a bitter and disillusioned failed poet, who has been forced by a vulgar public to sell out his dreams of writing serious literature.[30]

Instead, Sigismund is described as dedicated to his chosen career (he "gave himself wholly to this fascinating pursuit", TDW 13). He is a loyal friend to both George and Isabel Gilbert, and the last paragraph of the novel outlines a domestic happy ending for him that is denied to most of the other characters:

> [I]t has been observed of late that Mr Smith pays very special attention to the elder of the two orphans [Mr Raymond's wards], [...] and he has consulted Mr Raymond respecting the investment of his deposit-account, which is supposed to be something considerable; for a gentleman who lives chiefly upon bread-and-marmalade and weak tea may amass a very comfortable little independence from the cultivation of sensational literature in penny numbers. (TDW 404)

Sigismund obviously shares some of George Gilbert's Victorian virtues: he is also single-mindedly devoted to his career, he is industrious and lives a frugal life. His high level of pragmatism extends to his own reading: for Sigismund, books by other authors are building blocks for his own works. Far from showing any sign of anxiety of influence, he cheerfully admits to producing "combination novels," which "enable [...] a young author to present his public with all the brightest flowers of fiction neatly arranged into every variety of garland" (TDW 45). Despite this high level of pragmatism, however, Sigismund is far from being represented as a dull exemplar of ordinary common sense like his friend George Gilbert. Instead, his unusual capacity for imagination is emphasized as well as his enthusiasm for his work, which makes him forget about his own physical well-being so that living on bread and marmalade is not only a sign of frugality but also points to his ability to become wholly absorbed by his work. In this sense, he is represented as an amalgamation of the Romantic idea of the writer as genius and the more recent image of the writer as a professional businessman.[31]

Furthermore, Sigismund himself is shown as a vocal defender of his line of work and its products. Of all the characters in the novel, he is the one who is

---

30 A prominent example of such a figure would be the protagonist of Gissing's *New Grub Street* – see Brantlinger's interpretation of this novel (1998: 181–191).

31 See Shattock (2012), who describes how due to the increase in the number of periodicals in the 1820s and 30s, more writers started to perceive their work in terms of a business.

allowed the longest direct speeches, which contain lively and witty commentaries on the creation and effects of fictional writing.[32] In this sense, he has a function that is similar to that of the doctor in *The Female Quixote* or Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* – however, without the didactic dimension. His ideas are put forward as parts of a debate rather than as lessons.

In particular, Sigismund endorses the concept of reading for unsophisticated pleasure. He makes this point by taking the addiction metaphor, as employed by Samuel Smiles, Alfred Austin, and others, and turning it on its head:

> Why, you see, your penny public require excitement, [...] and in order to get the excitement up to a strong point, you're obliged to have recourse to bodies. [...] And when you've once had recourse to the stimulant of bodies, you're like a man who's accustomed to strong liquors, and to whose vitiated palate simple drinks seem flat and wishy-washy. [...] I think there ought to be a literary temperance pledge, by which the votaries of the ghastly and melodramatic school might bind themselves to the renunciation of the bowl [allusion to murder by poisoning, DB] and dagger, the midnight rendezvous, the secret grave dug by lantern-light under a black grove of cypress [...], and all the alcoholic elements of fiction. [...] But [...] it isn't so easy to turn teetotaller [...] and I scarcely know that it is so very wise to make the experiment. Are not reformed drunkards the dullest and most miserable of mankind? Isn't it better for a man to do his best in the style that is natural to him than to do badly in another man's line of business? *Box and Cox* is not a great work when criticised upon sternly aesthetic principles; but I would rather be the author of *Box and Cox*, and hear my audience screaming with laughter from the rise of the curtain to the fall thereof, than write a dull five-act-tragedy, in the unities of which Aristotle himself could find no flaw, but from whose performance panic-stricken spectators should slink away ere the second act came to its dreary close. (TDW 47)

Sigismund here takes up the argument about the desensitizing effect of depictions of violence in fiction which was levelled against 'sensation fiction' in particular, a notion that to this day is one of the main complaints against certain kinds of popular culture.[33] However, his take on the 'danger' of sensational elements is humorous rather than serious: dullness is represented as a bigger problem than taking a drink now and then – or writing to satisfy the readers' wishes.

---

32 Wolff discusses the extent to which Smith serves as Braddon's "mouthpiece" (1979: 126) and points out parallels between their situations (ibid.: 126–133). Pykett also sees "Smith's pronouncements on his own writing and on sensation writing in general [...] as a partly insouciant, partly defiant apologia for Braddon's fictional practice to date" (Pykett 1998: ix).

33 An example where criticism of fictional writing is explicitly connected to a broader critique of the degenerating effects of modern life in an industrialized urban society can be found in John Ruskin's "Fiction Fair and Foul" (1880). He argues that the demand for fiction portraying violence is a sign of the growing desensitization that the surplus of stimuli in a modern urban environment inflicts on the city dweller.

On the one hand, this passage – like many other elements in *The Doctor's Wife* – does suggest a separation of 'high' and 'low' culture, of works that have aesthetic value and others that are only meant to entertain the reader. On the other hand, it defends the pursuit of pleasure as a primary goal of writing. Sigismund is obviously (and, as the narrative of his success suggests, not without justification) proud of his talent and his achievements. The line between different kinds of culture does not seem to be sharply drawn – Sigismund himself, as we learn early on in the novel, has the idea that one day he is going to write his "*magnum opus*" (TDW 12), and there is nothing in the narrative to suggest that this is not at least a possibility. 'High' and 'low' fiction thus do not seem to be categorically opposed but situated at different points of the same spectrum. Both are (or should be) dedicated to pleasing their audience. Both, moreover, share a common heritage, as Sigismund's fondness for 'combination novels'[34] and rewritings (for example the idea to rewrite *The Vicar of Wakefield* as a crime story) suggests.

The relationship between (commercial) author and (penny) audience also turns out to be more complex than it appears at first sight. In the above-cited passage, the addiction metaphor is not only applied to the reader but also to the writer – it is the producer, not the recipient, of fiction who should follow the "temperance pledge". The "stimulant" of the descriptions of violence has an effect on their producer as well as on his audience. In this context, however, the imagery of consumption has much more benign connotations than it does in Smiles's or Austin's critiques of reading: it balances out the image of the author as a "cool tradesman" by suggesting that he is genuinely enthusiastic about his creations. It also provides a more egalitarian image than that of the "penny public" gobbling up the greasy fiction dished up by the author insofar as it suggests that the relation between author and audience is at its core based on a shared interest in the pleasure that can be derived from an exciting story.

If one considers the exploration of both the consumption and production of fiction as socially embedded phenomena as the central subject of *The Doctor's Wife*, then Sigismund turns out to be much more than just a marginal element of comic relief. Isabel's character provides a test case for imagining the complex interrelationship of romance plot patterns and the formation of individual desire, and thus also serves to re-assess the knotty question of the relation between reading and moral behaviour. Her confinement to a rather isolated domestic

---

34 "'The combination novel enables a young author to present his public with all the brightest flowers of fiction neatly arranged into every variety of garland. I'm doing a combination novel now – the *Heart of Midlothian* and the *Wandering Jew*. You've no idea how admirably the two stories blend'" (TDW 45).

sphere is an extreme scenario at whose climax the young reader's view of the world is almost completely divorced from her social relations in the actual world of the text. By contrast, Sigismund Smith's role as a creator of fiction is what defines all his social relations in the first place. His characterization allows Braddon to explore literature as an economical institution and thus to call into question the ideal of the great novel as a purely aesthetic phenomenon.

In spite of the great contrasts in the two characters' relations to fictional reading, they resemble each other in one respect: in both cases, fictional wish-fulfilment has an impact on the realm of 'real' every-day life. Although Sigismund seems to have a very sober and pragmatic outlook on the purpose which his fictional productions serve, he finds that his creations have a dramatic effect on the way in which other people see *him*: they expect the author of sensation fiction to be "a splendid creature, half magician, half brigand, with a pale face and fierce black eyes" and are disappointed to find that he is in fact "a very mild young man, with the most placid blue eyes that ever looked out of a human head" (TDW 13). The contrast is staged in different variants and to comic effect in the novel, and the joke is first and foremost on Sigismund's readers, who mix up the author with his creations. As Nemesvari argues, Braddon thus prefigures Foucault's notion of the "author function" as an entity circumscribed by the text itself and uses the description of Sigismund's retreat from personal contacts with his readers in order to "protest [...] her own entrapment as an author whose name is so heavily identified with one (reprobated) form of writing that it cannot escape the assumptions automatically invoked when it appears" (2011: 151). The performance of authorship in the novels, one might say, is here staged as having an effect on the actual author's public life.

What I find particularly interesting is that Sigismund's role as a sensation writer is described as an opportunity as well as a problem. The confusion of fantasy and actual world on the part of his readers is related to the fusion that takes place in Sigismund's own understanding of himself:

> He could afford to take life very quietly himself; for was he not, in a vicarious manner, going through more adventures than ever the mind of man imagined? [...] Is it slow to be on board a ship on fire in the middle of the lonely Atlantic, and to rescue the entire crew on one fragile raft, with the handsomest female passenger lashed to your waist by the means of her back hair? (TDW 31)

Sigismund, it seems, is able to draw satisfaction from fictional wish-fulfilment that, in contrast to Isabel's, does not threaten to destroy his social standing. He is an extravagant figure, but this extravagance emerges as a positive part of his individuality. In contrast to that of Isabel, his engagement with the fictional world is a conscious engagement in role play. It is anchored in his experiences of the social

world and even constitutes a socially recognized part of his profession as an author.

<div align="center">***</div>

In *Reading the Romance*, Radway makes a spirited case against the deeply engrained perception of the reader of popular fiction as a passive consumer:

> Commodities like mass-produced literary texts are selected, purchased, constructed and used by real people with previously existing needs, desires, intentions, and interpretive strategies. By reinstating those active individuals and their creative, constructive activities in the heart of our interpretive enterprise, we avoid blinding ourselves to the fact that the essentially human practice of making meaning goes on even in a world increasingly dominated by things and by consumption. In thus recalling the interactive character of operations like reading, we restore time, process, and action to our account of human endeavour and therefore increase the possibility of doing justice to its essential complexity and ambiguity as practice. (Radway 1991: 221)

I have read Braddon's novel as engaging with the same issues as Radway. The representations of Isabel Sleaford and Sigismund Smith dramatize the complexities of reading for pleasure and reading as consumption. The novel presents detailed backgrounds for the characters' ways of using fiction: in Isabel's case, the psychological dimension of reading as bound up with her development and her domestic confinement is emphasized. Once again, the representation of the quixotic reader as female thus serves to establish an extreme scenario in order to explore the impact of reading on a particularly receptive subject. Sigismund's story, in turn, reflects on reading as an institutionalized practice and critically examines the evaluative stratifications in the established literary system.

By foregrounding Isabel's and Sigismund's attitudes towards reading as consumption, moreover, Braddon's novel continues the exploration of an issue that was already discernible in *Northanger Abbey*: books are regarded as integral parts of a consumer culture. This culture is ambivalent: it has materialistic and superficial aspects, but it also affords legitimate pleasures such as the gratification of a desire for aesthetic experiences and sociability.

Overall, then, *The Doctor's Wife* both represents and complicates tendencies to establish clear boundaries between officially sanctioned, acceptable reading practices and their unruly, unendorsed counterparts, in particular various ways of reading for self-gratification. These unsanctioned forms of reading are explored in a surprisingly sympathetic way, especially if compared with the deeply pessimistic representation of the Victorian print market in works like George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891).

Part III

Chapter 6
Looking Forward, Looking Back: Novel Reading in the Twenty-First Century

As the previous three chapters have demonstrated, quixotic plots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries engage with the hopes and anxieties connected with the novel as an emerging and then as an established and dominant medial form. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the cultural relevance of novel reading has again become a matter of debate. Reading books as an activity is being replaced by other medial practices – social media loom large, and so do computer games and TV shows. Possible inheritors of the novel's cultural status and function have already been named. For example, it has been argued that what Brett Martin (2013: 9) has called the "new Golden Age" of the American TV show now provides the complex storytelling and in-depth psychological analysis formerly seen as the province of the novel. Examples include the reception of shows like *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad* or *The Wire*, which its creator David Simon has dubbed a "novel for television" (Martin 2013: 147).[1] It seems possible that, as Sven Birkerts has influentially predicted in *The Gutenberg Elegies* (1994), the age of reading and print culture has come to an end.[2]

At the same time, however, as Suzanne Keen has remarked, "the novel as a form currently enjoys the best press of its three-century career" (2007: 39). Debates about the problematic effects of media consumption have shifted to other forms (computer games and social media come readily to mind). Discussions focussing on the effects of novel reading, conversely, tend to focus on perceived benefits such as training the capacity to concentrate for longer periods of time –

---

1 For a detailed discussion of this new type of TV show cf. Jason Mittell's *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (2012–13). Some implications of the comparisons of TV shows like *The Wire* to "the great European novel" – which incidentally suggest that the novel itself is past its prime – are discussed in Birke/Butter (2012). For a careful investigation of the impact of new media formats on narrative fiction see Ryan (2004). To give the debate a further turn of the screw, Frank Kelleter (2012) has recently argued that the new high cultural status of what has been dubbed "quality TV" is connected to the fact that TV itself has lost its significance as a cutting-edge popular medium to digital media.

2 A more nuanced discussion of this scenario is provided e.g. by Gauger (1994). The tendency to conflate 'novel' and 'printed book' is a notable feature of the debate and has been increasingly criticized since the advent of the e-book. The Australian writer Malcolm Neil succinctly sums up his criticism of the conflation in a recent interview about "Bookshops, ebooks and the future of the novel": "[I]t's never been about the book, it's always been about what's inside it. We're in love with the book and we fetishise it. That's great, but that's not the future" (Weldon/Case/Neil 2012).

an ability that cultural critics like Manfred Spitzer, who coined the phrase 'digital dementia', perceive to be rapidly declining.[3] Reading, and novel reading in particular, has come to be seen as an alternative, even an antidote to newer and less positively evaluated types of medial practice.

Fine examples of this type of discourse can be found in Leo Babauta's *Zen Habits*, one of the U.S.'s most popular self-help blogs: "We have no time to read anymore, mostly because we work too much, we overschedule our time, we're on the Internet all the time (which does have some good reading, but can also suck our attention endlessly), and we watch too much TV."[4] Clearly, Babauta regards reading as a culturally valued activity, linked to positive traits such as the ability to focus one's attention and to concentrate on a meaningful task. More specifically, the activity that Babauta advocates is novel reading, as he makes explicit in the next paragraph of the same blog post: "Reading a good book is one of my favourite things in the world. A novel is a time machine, a worm-hole to different dimensions, a special magic that puts you into the minds and bodies of fascinating people." The ease with which Babauta shifts from "reading" to "novel" suggests that he expects his users to go along with this representation of novel reading as both a prototypical kind of reading and a commendable type of media consumption – and thus, as different in important ways from the type of activity in which they are engaging as they peruse Babauta's text. The celebration of novel reading as a particularly valuable practice that compares favourably to other medial activities has become a commonplace, as has the idea that it can be regarded as a good habit that is increasingly rare but should be trained, just like healthy eating, regular exercise, and decluttering one's home.

In his study *Bring On the Books for Everybody* (2010), the media scholar Jim Collins critically examines the notion that in the early twenty-first century, the novel is a disappearing genre. Sales of novels, he points out, are still going strong. Moreover, he describes the development of a medial environment which revolves around the novel as a central commodity. In his account, instead of being pushed to the margins, literary reading has become the hub of new medial constellations. In the case of the United States, this constellation involves corporations such as Amazon.com and the Barnes & Noble bookstores, the TV empire of Oprah Winfrey, whose Book Club has become one of the most influential forces in book marketing, but also decentralized agents such as the many book blogs and read-

---

3 See Spitzer, *Digitale Demenz: Wie wir uns und unsere Kinder um den Verstand bringen* (2012).
4 Leo Babauta on *Zen Habits*, "How to Read More: A Lover's Guide", posted October 3, 2011. *Zen Habits*, according to Wikipedia, is "one of the most visited blogs on the internet," with currently (January 2014) about 240,000 subscribers and many more visitors. *Time Magazine* named it one of the world's best blogs in both 2009 and 2010.

ing clubs that can be found on the internet (see Collins 2010: 39–114). In sum, Collins regards literary reading (of printed books as well as e-books) as a significant part of what Henry Jenkins (2006) describes as 'convergence culture': the contemporary medial environment in which users integrate different old and new medial practices. New media, according to this theory, do not simply replace old media, but their rise produces a shift in functions ascribed to existing practices.

One of the most interesting parts of Collins's book deals with the ways in which the notion of the impending obsolescence of the novel and its high cultural status are linked. Within a transmedially embedded "popular literary culture", as he dubs it, he identifies a prominent strand that actually promotes the *singularity* of the novel and the book as a medium. This "Devoutly Literary" (2010: 223) trend revolves around the central trope of "the celebration of [...] reading as transformative cultural activity that can occur only in books and nowhere else in the hypermediated culture where that reading takes place" (2010: 82). The impression that novel reading is a disappearing practice only seemingly clashes with this conviction of its singularity. If Michael Giesecke is right that 'new' media always generate fears and controversy (see 2007: 204), it seems unsurprising that a comparatively 'old' medium can become a badge of culture and sophistication. The perceived threat of obsolescence, in this scenario, can work as a public relations strategy: novel readers can feel that their pursuit is extraordinary and that by reading a novel they are engaging in a more sophisticated type of media consumption than the TV viewer or the internet user. Rather a large number of contemporary novels, as Collins notes, feature plots and characters which highlight this special function of reading (2010: 222–223).

The two quixotic novels that are at the centre of the case studies in the following two chapters – Ian McEwan's *Atonement* and Alan Bennett's *The Uncommon Reader* – are part of this international trend of acclaimed and popular books that revolve around book culture and reading as a main theme. Prominent further examples include Umberto Eco's *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004), Tom Perrotta's *Little Children* (2004), Marisha Pessl's *Special Topics in Calamity Physics* (2006), Carlos Ruiz Zafón's *The Cemetery of Forgotten Books* series (2001-ongoing) and Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005). What distinguishes McEwan's and Bennett's works from these other productions, however, is their particular use of the quixotic plot to focus on the issue of the benefits of novel reading and the social status of the novel genre.

I read the two works as complementary. McEwan, as I will demonstrate in chapter 7, takes up the trend also to be perceived in Braddon to develop the quixotic motif towards a psychologically complex explanation of how readers blend fictional patterns and lived experience. The focus on cognition and storytelling as an ambivalent phenomenon is the pivot for a broader exploration of the

ethical dimensions of storytelling in general and the novel as a genre in particular. Moreover, *Atonement* takes stock of the different narrative techniques that have developed in the course of the history of the novel. Its historical dimension is already implicit in the novel's temporal setting: rather than covering only a few formative years in the development of the quixotic protagonist, the novel spans more than sixty years between 1935 and 1999.

While *Atonement* offers a cultural-historical perspective on the novel and seriously engages with questions of ethics, *The Uncommon Reader* playfully introduces a kaleidoscope of attitudes towards novel reading in a contemporary setting. Bennett's text inverts the quixotic plot in such a way that it reflects the current preoccupation with the *benefits* of reading – of all the examples discussed in this study, his is the only rendering of an obsessive reader that is straightforwardly and predominantly positive. The theme of misreading is sidelined in Bennett's plot. Even though in the story itself, new media are hardly mentioned at all, *The Uncommon Reader* can be read as centrally concerned with the current shift in medial practices. The protagonist – a counterfactual version of Elizabeth II, Queen of England – engages in novel reading as a nostalgic pursuit which swims against the medial tide.

Both works register similar shifts in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century perception of the benefits of novel reading. The first shift concerns the notion of novels as eliciting empathy in their readers, i.e. the idea that the special kind of insight into the minds and emotions of fictional characters which the novel facilitates has an effect on the reader's stance towards other people in his or her real-world environment. As the discussion of Austen's reaction to the discourses on readerly sympathy in connection with the sentimental novel has illustrated, the novel's potential to evoke empathy has been a central argument of the genre's champions for a long time.[5] In the twentieth century, however, the debate seems to have shifted from a concern with the direct effect of literary models on an individual's emotions and behaviour to a concern with the training of relevant capacities. A prominent contemporary example of such a belief in the potential of literary reading, and novels in particular, to provide ethically relevant cognitive training would be the idea that reading the right works enhances

---

5 There have also been critical voices for just as long, whether from those who criticize the surfeit of emotions evoked in the reader as gratuitous, or those who doubt that empathy with literary figures has any positive effects on real-life behaviour. For a historical overview of the central importance of the concept of empathy in discourses on the novel, see Keen (2007: 37–64). Keen also provides an excellent discussion of the problems involved in assuming direct links between empathy (feeling "*with* another", ibid.: xxi), sympathy ("feeling *for* another", ibid.) and active altruism.

Fremdverstehen, i.e. the ability to understand and tolerate different backgrounds and value systems.[6] Another influential theory about the novel's social training of its audience, this time from the field of cognitive narratology, is Lisa Zunshine's *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (2006), in which she argues that the reason for the genre's popularity is that it allows readers to hone their ability to make inferences about other people's thoughts and emotions.

Champions of the novel in the late twentieth century have not only developed a variant of the idea that novel reading enhances the reader's understanding of and thus relations with others. The second notion that one encounters frequently is that reading trains critical thinking. This, too, is hardly a new idea – it is highly reminiscent of enlightenment views about reading and its effect of broadening the minds of recipients and sharpening their rational capacities.[7] The twist to the concept in twentieth-century discourses on the novel is the way in which the idea of the novel reader as a critical thinker is tied to notions of nonconformism. In representations of the reader rebelling against dystopian regimes, the figure gains a heroic dimension that is connected with but also exceeds the heroic potential of the quixotic reader of earlier times.

The most prominent early representative of this trend is probably Guy Montag, the protagonist of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). This novel imagines a society in which books are banned and the government uses new media for propaganda purposes. Montag's conversion from a book-burning follower of the system to a member of a group of exiled rebels who fight the regime by memorising novels must clearly be read as a critical commentary on the repression of free thinking in the Nazi regime. However, as Collins notes, *Fahrenheit 451* has achieved cult status in later decades "because it imagines readers as imperiled counterculture" (2010: 72). Contemporary proponents of novel reading associate the ability to develop and retain independent critical thinking with a particular type of media consumption which, at the same time, is envisaged as being replaced by other kinds of media. In comments about the novel on the Amazon website, Bradbury's work is frequently described as a 'prophetic' foreshadowing of changes in the medial landscape and the threat they pose.

Both of these late twenty-first century tendencies in the assessment of novel reading are combined in the work of one of its most prominent contemporary advocates, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum. She explores the benefits of novel reading in terms of its impact on critical thinking as well as on the reader's

---

6 This idea is particularly prominent in didactics of literature approaches, see for example Bredella et al. (2000), Nünning (2001a).

7 See e.g. Mary Wollstonecraft's view on novel reading that has been discussed in the chapter on Austen.

relations to others. In her essay collection *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (1990), Nussbaum argues that novels are particularly good at exploring and inviting the reader to explore the question 'how do I live well', touching upon subjects such as human relationships and priorities in life.[8] In her account, it is primarily the canonical novel of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that fulfils this function – her main examples are works by Henry James, Charles Dickens and Marcel Proust. While Nussbaum herself in her essays is engaged in teasing out the specific themes and questions with which individual novels are concerned, her main argument about the value of novels rests on the idea that these works train their readers in a fundamental way: "The novels show us the worth and richness of plural qualitative thinking and engender in their readers a richly qualitative kind of seeing" (Nussbaum 1990: 36). This effect, Nussbaum argues, is created not only by the content of a literary work but also by its particular form: "[l]iterary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content" (ibid.: 3). Among the formal features that are significant she considers, for example, voice and point of view (ibid: 32).

The renewed interest in the ethics of reading that speaks from these contemporary views on novel reading, then, pertains to both an ethics of form and an ethics of content. *Atonement* and *The Uncommon Reader*, as I will demonstrate in the following two chapters, develop views on the current status of reading that respond to, are premised on, critically question, or modify these notions.

---

8 In her book *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1995), Nussbaum explores the practical implications of this argument and argues for an inclusion of the analysis of novels in the curriculum of law schools at universities. It is work like this that supports Keen's comment on the tendency to give novels "credit for the character-building renovation of readers into open-minded, generous citizens" (Keen 2007: 39).

Chapter 7
Taking Stock of the Novel Reader's History: Ian McEwan's *Atonement*

Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) starts with an epigraph from *Northanger Abbey*:

> 'Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English: that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?'
> They had reached the end of the gallery; and with tears of shame she ran off to her own room.

In Austen's novel, Henry Tilney's admonition to Catherine directly follows the passage in which she goes in search of General Tilney's Bluebeard chamber in the castle and finds only a deserted but well-ordered room. This scene is an important turning point in the quixotic plot: Catherine's brief bout of reading-induced folly becomes apparent to another character. The placement of this reference at the beginning of McEwan's novel foregrounds *Atonement*'s connection with the quixotic tradition. More specifically, the focus on a moral evaluation of Catherine's behaviour draws attention to McEwan's interest in the ethical dimensions of reading. While the question of the quixotic reader's culpability that the passage alludes to is treated rather lightly in Austen's work, it becomes a central concern in McEwan's. In turn, the reference to "social and literary intercourse" as a civilizing force epitomizes Austen's vision of a community of taste in which literary reading plays a central role. In *Atonement*, the question of the potential social impact of literature undergoes a critical re-examination.

The subject of misreading in a figurative sense must be seen as a dominant theme in the plot of *Atonement*, which is the story of a fatal mistake: the protagonist, thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis, destroys the lives of her older sister Cecilia and her lover Robbie by wrongly accusing Robbie of raping her cousin. While the first part of the novel details the events and associations that lead to this accusation, the remaining three parts are concerned with its consequences. McEwan thus elaborates on an aspect that is suggested in the passage quoted above but not developed in *Northanger Abbey* as a whole: he makes the quixotic mistake the turning point of his characters' lives, while in Austen's novel,

neither Catherine's folly nor Henry's admonition have any lasting conse-
quences.

What is less obvious in *Atonement* than in the other quixotic novels discussed
in this study is the connection between reading books in a literal sense and
misreading in a figurative sense: there is no explicit commentary on the perni-
cious effect of particular works of fiction on the protagonist's mind. However,
Briony's mistake is closely tied to her status both as an avid reader and a writer of
fiction. McEwan updates the quixotic plot in such a way that it includes contem-
porary views on the functioning of perception and narration. Through the char-
acter of the quixotic reader who is also a writer, *Atonement* ties a narrative of
individual development to a more general exploration of the development of the
novel as a genre. I will examine in detail how the complex case of one quixotic
reader/writer raises larger questions about the ethics of content and form. In a
more systematic way than any of the other quixotic novels considered so far,
Atonement reflects on how concerns with the ethical effects of fiction resonate in
the history of the novel.

Briony as a Quixotic Reader/Writer and the Problem of Cognition

Atonement is divided into four parts, laying out a central scene of quixotic reading
and its aftermath on different time levels. Part one, which makes up about half of
the work, is set at the Tallis family's manor house in the English countryside and
narrates two days in the summer of 1935. This part describes the chain of events
leading to the wrongful accusation and arrest of Robbie Turner, the charlady's
son, on the charge of having raped a young girl, Mrs. Tallis's niece Lola. Briony,
the quixotic reader who mistakenly names him as the perpetrator, is the protago-
nist of part one, although the perspectives of many other figures are also ex-
plored. Part two takes place in 1940 and is concerned with the last days before the
evacuation of the British troops, Robbie among them, from the French mainland.
Part three, also set in 1940, is told from Briony's perspective and describes her
training as a nurse in a London war hospital as well as her attempt to mend
matters with Robbie and Cecilia. Finally, the fourth part, which is the shortest and
reads like an epilogue, reveals that parts one to three are a manuscript written by
Briony herself, who has become a successful author. Set in the year 1999, this is
the only part featuring homodiegetic narration: Briony relates how she revisits
her childhood home, where a party is given in honour of her seventy-seventh
birthday. Having just been diagnosed with vascular dementia, she does not have

much time left; the metafictional twist at the end of the story describes the manuscript draft of her family's story as her last work, written in order to "achieve atonement" (AT 371).

In the novel's first part, Briony appears as an updated version of Lennox's female quixote. Like Arabella, she grows up in a secluded environment, in the "relative isolation of the Tallis house" (AT 5), and, like Arabella's, her seclusion is intensified by her immersion in a world of her own imagination. The novel begins with the description of a play Briony has written, which sounds like an unwitting parody of the type of romance ridiculed at the beginning of *Northanger Abbey*:

> At some moments chilling, at others desperately sad, the play told a tale of the heart whose message, conveyed in a rhyming prologue, was that love which did not build a foundation on good sense was doomed. The reckless passion of the heroine, Arabella, for a wicked foreign count is punished by ill fortune [...]. (AT 3)

The name of the play's protagonist is not the only reference to Lennox's novel. The male hero in Briony's play is "an impoverished doctor – in fact, a prince in disguise who has elected to work among the needy" (AT 3), which is reminiscent both of the figure of the 'doctor' who brings about the happy ending in Lennox and of the eighteenth-century Arabella's tendency to see princes in disguise wherever she goes.[1] Clearly, like Lennox's protagonist, Briony has been influenced by romantic fiction; unlike her literary predecessor, however, she combines the figure of the reader with that of the author. In her own writing, she uses stock features of romance and melodrama and thus enacts a particularly vivid example of the writer as *bricoleur*. This close connection between the acts of reading and writing serves to give another turn of the screw to the quixotic reader's status as an active producer of meaning rather than only a passive consumer.

In the course of the novel, it quickly becomes apparent that Briony's reading, besides shaping the writing she produces, also strongly influences her perception of the 'real' world around her. Indeed, writing, reading (both in a literal and a figurative sense), and perceiving are very closely related in *Atonement*. The key scene in which this connection is established, the much-discussed fountain scene, is told twice, from different perspectives. The first time, the focus is on

---

1 I do not have conclusive evidence that McEwan has read *The Female Quixote* and consciously refers to it here, but the name "Arabella" is unusual enough that a coincidence seems unlikely. *Atonement* also features a few more details which can be read as intertextual references to Lennox's novel, such as a passage about carp-stealing that recalls one of the comic highlights of *The Female Quixote* (AT 73) and – more noteworthily – a scene in which Briony throws herself into a pond because she wants to be rescued like a princess in a romance story, which is reminiscent of Arabella's similarly self-endangering leap into the river (AT 230–232).

Briony's sister Cecilia, who goes outside in order to fill a vase of flowers with water at the fountain behind the house. There, she encounters Robbie, and as a consequence of the banter between the two, a part of the vase breaks off and falls into the fountain. In a dramatic gesture, Cecilia strips off her dress and dives into the basin to retrieve the parts. This, as it will later turn out, is a turning point in the relationship, as it will prompt Robbie and Cecilia to realize that they have fallen in love with each other. The second time, the scene is told from the perspective of Briony, who happens to observe her sister and Robbie from her window but cannot hear what they are saying. Immediately, she starts to interpret what she sees in terms of her literary reading:

> A proposal of marriage. Briony would not have been surprised. [...] What was presented here fitted well. Robbie Turner, only son of a cleaning lady and of no known father [...] had the boldness of ambition to ask for Cecilia's hand. It made perfect sense. Such leaps across boundaries were the stuff of daily romance. (AT 38)

Cecilia's plunge into the fountain and her subsequent quick departure, however, do not conform to Briony's expectations:

> The sequence was illogical – the drowning scene, followed by a rescue, should have preceded the marriage proposal. Such was Briony's last thought before she accepted that she did not understand, and that she must simply watch. [...] Briony had her first, weak intimation that for her now it could no longer be fairy-tale castles and princesses, but the strangeness of the here and now, of what passed between people, the ordinary people that she knew, and what power one could have over the other, and how easy it was to get everything wrong, completely wrong. (AT 39)

The lesson Arabella learns at the end of Lennox's novel, it seems, is here already established at the beginning of the story: Briony understands that the patterns of behaviour she is familiar with from her reading are not sufficient for an understanding of other people's actions. As it turns out, however, later on in the story she reverts to making a more calamitous version of the same mistake. Subsequent events she also only half understands – a misdirected note from Robbie, which refers to Cecilia's "cunt", and a love encounter between Cecilia and Robbie which Briony witnesses – lead her to think of Robbie as a "maniac" and Cecilia as his victim. This division of roles is clearly influenced by the black-and-white types of melodrama. When her cousin Lola is raped that night in the park, Briony, who has only seen the silhouette of the perpetrator, has no doubt it must have been Robbie, whom she has after all already labelled as a villain:

> As far as she was concerned, everything fitted; the terrible present fulfilled the recent past. Events she herself witnessed foretold her cousin's calamity. If only she, Briony, had been

> less innocent, less stupid. Now she saw, the affair was too consistent, too symmetrical to be anything other than what she said it was. (AT 168)

As a result of her 'eyewitness' account, the innocent Robbie is sentenced to a prison sentence for rape.

Like Isabel's romantic fantasies in *The Doctor's Wife*, Briony's erroneous interpretations of the world around her are – especially after the fountain scene – clearly marked as more psychologically sophisticated than a naïve confusion of fiction with fact. Indeed, *Atonement* to some extent questions the stability of the boundary between fact and fiction by positing that there is no such thing as objective perception: one only sees what one knows, or rather what one believes one knows. This notion is introduced in the description of the fountain scene and is later on particularly emphasized in the scene in which Briony encounters Lola right after the rape. The passage traces the complex process of Briony's trying to make sense of the confusing sensory data she receives in the darkness of the night:

> the bush that lay directly in her path [...] began to break up in front of her, or double itself, or waver, and then fork. It was changing its shape in a complicated way, thinning at the base as a vertical column rose five or six feet. [...] The vertical mass was a figure, a person who was now backing away from her [...]. (AT 164)

The interrelation between perception and previous knowledge in the process of cognition is spelled out from Briony's point of view later on in the passage: "[s]he would have preferred to qualify, or complicate, her use of the word 'saw'. Less like seeing, more like knowing" (AT 170). In *Atonement*, the quixotic plot thus raises questions about cognition as a constructive process. To some extent, *Atonement* suggests, perception is always governed by preconceived ideas. McEwan's work, then, can be seen as part of the trend towards an interest in reading as a complex process of cognitive conditioning and the application of patterns, a process that is as integral to understanding as it is potentially fallible.

More specifically, Briony's story can also be regarded as reflecting a concern with in the construction of narrative identity, a notion that has attracted much interest in both literary theory and in fictional works in the last few decades. Novels such as Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and *When We Were Orphans*, Penelope Lively's *The Photograph*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* or Graham Swift's *Waterland* explore the potential of storytelling as an everyday (rather than specifically literary or artistic) process. Narrative theorists, psychologists, and literary scholars, in turn, have examined the ways in which storytelling as a crucial human faculty is central to a sense of personal

identity.[2] Briony's wish to see herself as her sister's protector rather than as a clueless bystander in the drama of Cecilia's and Robbie's affair, for example, can be read as a fictional exploration of the tendency to emphasize the agency of self in the construction of autobiographical narratives (see Bruner 1994: 41). *Atonement*, like most of the other contemporary novels just named, particularly highlights the ambivalent power of storytelling, which can be distorting and destructive.

Since the quixotic plot tends to draw attention to the quixotic reader's mental and emotional processes, it is no surprise that it also lends itself to an exploration of currently hot topics like the workings of cognition and the functions of narrative. An even more obvious and perhaps surprising link between McEwan's twenty-first-century version and the earlier examples discussed in this study is the interest in moral issues: *Atonement* raises the question to what extent Briony's reading and storytelling must be evaluated negatively, as manipulative and self-serving. The issue of the protagonist's culpability has divided the critical response to the novel. Anja Müller-Wood opts for a clearly negative assessment, reading the epigraph from *Northanger Abbey* as a "signal inviting the reader to withstand the fiction created by Briony in parts one to three, asking them to recognize and deconstruct her strategy" (Müller-Wood 2007: 150). Müller-Wood, in other words, sees the references to the quixotic plot as an indication that Briony's reading and telling of her life should not only be questioned on the level of the story but also on the level of the discourse, where the metafictional twist in part four represents Briony as the author-narrator. This assessment contradicts Briony's own view of her storytelling as a vindicating act or 'atonement' for her earlier transgression. In line with my reading of the quixotic plots in the previous three chapters, I will complicate Müller-Wood's argument: once again, the theme of quixotic reading lends itself to ambivalent evaluations, which means that the ethical implications of Briony's actions in the novel are not as straightforward as either her own or Müller-Wood's comments suggest. The question of evaluation is significant beyond the level of individual psychology: the invitation to assess Briony's activity as an author also entails an assessment of the purposes and effects of (different kinds of) fictional writing.

---

2 See, for example, Birke (2008), Bruner (1994), Neumann (2005), Eakin (1999), and Caruth (1996).

Achieving Atonement? Briony's Ethics of Storytelling

As I have suggested above, the question of Briony's responsibility and guilt has been a central issue in many scholarly treatments of the novel (see e.g. Albers/Caeners [2009], Cavalié [2009], Concha [2007], D'hoker [2006], Müller-Wood [2007] and Phelan [2005a]). Critics have paid close attention to the connections between her actions as a protagonist (some of which are acts of storytelling) and as a narrator, i.e. her acts of relating these events in retrospect. Some, like Müller-Wood, have come to the conclusion that Briony falls short in both respects and that the novel thus mainly draws attention to the constructed character of stories, projecting a critical reading stance which focuses on the self-serving character of these narratives. This is certainly one reading that is supported by the novel. What makes *Atonement* interesting as an inquiry into the ethical problems connected with practices of reading and writing, however, is that it explores different aspects of the issue of ethics. The evaluation of Briony's actions is complicated by the fact that the novel offers so many different standards according to which she can be judged, and that these different evaluations do not come together as a coherent whole.

There is, first of all, the question of whether Briony's original act of misreading is an innocent mistake or whether it should be regarded as a "crime" (AT 156). The novel offers no conclusive answer. On the one hand, it is clear that Briony is very young at the time, that she has little experience of the world, and that she does not simply make up a lie with the intent to harm Robbie and Cecilia but that she is actually confused. On the other hand, *Atonement* highlights connections between Briony's character traits and her quixotic adjustments of reality that cast a more dubious light on her. For example, in the scene which deals with her testimony to the police she does appear as blameworthy insofar as she is unwilling to re-examine the origins of her convictions about Robbie. Her "sense of doing and being good" (AT 176) and the "joyful feeling of blameless self-love" (AT 177) stand in stark contrast to her questionable act of prying into Cecilia's room and presenting Robbie's 'dirty' letter as seeming evidence. Even more importantly, her wish to be her sister's and Lola's protector is framed not only or even primarily as an altruistic impulse but also as a self-centred action, fuelled by "her own vile excitement" (AT 173) about the events and her special role in them. Her false accusation, it is suggested, is linked to a desire for attention, to gain approval, or, to use a theatrical metaphor, to take centre stage in what she perceives to be her family's drama.

If the novel already makes it hard to arrive at a definitive evaluation of Briony's original misreading and, as one might call it, mis-telling, it is even more

difficult to decide how to assess her position as the narrator of parts one to three of *Atonement*. The title of the novel itself already opens up different perspectives on the ethics of her storytelling. First of all, one can read Briony's project of "achiev[ing] atonement" (AT 371) in the sense of 'atonement' as the "propitiation of an offended or injured person, by reparation of wrong or injury" (*OED*). The context in which Briony as a homodiegetic narrator in part four introduces the concept indeed suggests that she wants to make amends by revealing the facts of what happened all these years ago. What fits with this idea is that she calls her writing a "forensic memoir" (AT 370). As she explains, "I've regarded it as my duty to disguise nothing – the names, the places, the exact circumstances – I put it all there as a matter of historical record" (AT 369). This suggests that the 'crime' of a storytelling which has led to false conclusions can be rectified through an act of storytelling in which the right conclusions are reached. However, as Briony-the-author explains in the fourth part, the true account can only be published after the main culprits involved, Lola and Paul Marshall, have died (see AT 370). A 'reparation' in a legal or practical sense thus does not occur.

A second ethical aspect of Briony's 'atonement' is highlighted most succinctly in Elke D'hoker's interpretation: D'hoker reads the novel as a "confessional narrative" in which the assertion of facts is not just a legal matter but first and foremost an attempt to articulate (and in this process actually to discover) truths about oneself and to attain self-acceptance (D'hoker 2006: 41). The 'atonement' of the title can in this sense be understood as "expiation" or "amends" (*OED*). The religious connotations of the word ("reconciliation or restoration of friendly relations between God and sinners", ibid.) suggest that the act has a special significance, even if the context is secularized. While the novel does not reflect overtly religious sensibilities, the reparation Briony wants to achieve is clearly more than just a practical matter; it entails the idea of being at peace with herself. Confession, in this view, is not so much a religious concept as a matter of psycho-hygiene, but the association with the religious sphere serves to elevate its status. The crucial question here (which I will return to later) is whether one regards Briony's confession as an honest attempt at self-reflection or rather as a selfish way of making herself feel better.

Thirdly, Briony's story can, as Earl Ingersoll (2004: 242) has pointed out, also be understood as the attempt to achieve 'at-onement' in the obsolete sense of the word, "the condition of being at one with others; unity of feeling, harmony, concord", or, in processual terms, "the action of setting at one [...] after discord or strife" (*OED*). Briony's wish for harmony with others is expressed, for example, in her appreciation of Cecilia's and Robbie's love at the end of part three (AT 349) and her hope of being reunited with her sister. This desire for unity has been understood as a plea for togetherness instead of a narcissist preoccupation with

the self – Fritz-Wilhelm Neumann, for example, argues that *Atonement* thus criticizes one of the main tendencies of individualist late twentieth-century Western societies (Neumann 2005: 345). The desire for at-onement in this sense can also be associated with the wish to understand others on their terms rather than judging them according to one's own. This is a position that is first represented in the fountain scene, when Briony's focus on her own imaginary drama (with Cecilia and Robbie as puppets) is interrupted by an epiphany about the independent reality of other people's lives: "was everyone else really as alive as she was? [...] If the answer was yes, then the world, the social world, was unbearably complicated, with two billion voices, and everyone's thoughts striving in equal importance and everyone's claim on life as intense" (AT 36). As the discussion of the fountain scene has shown, Briony subsequently fails to take into account the gap between her own experience and judgment and that of others. Instead of heeding her early epiphany about the unreadability of others and "how easy it was to get everything wrong" (AT 39), she imposes her own interpretation.

Ángeles de la Concha, in her reading of *Atonement*, interprets this failure in Levinasian terms: for her, Briony's judgment of Cecilia and Robbie entails that "[b]oth are depersonalised in the process, their complex nature as full human beings reduced to a single part, not even true" (Concha 2007: 203). In her analysis their actions are thus "in point of fact an exertion of violence" (ibid.: 201), which can be countered by

> an openness and a receptiveness to the other that, [...] according to Levinas, precedes cognition and radically affects it. [...] The power of affect, or of being affected, would prevent the subject – or the narrator – from assuming the right of possession of the other imposing his or her sole terms of reference, thus allowing for the possibility of different versions. (Concha 2007: 199)

This Levinasian reading makes it more comprehensible why Briony's mistake might merit the label of "crime" that she herself applies to it (e.g. AT 156), beyond the more technical legal issue of having given false testimony. It also gives a stronger foundation to the notion that Briony's crime of storytelling may be repaired through another act of storytelling, i.e. the new version of events told in *Atonement*.

Such a positive view of Briony as finally achieving 'at-onement', harmony with others, through her storytelling is, however, complicated by yet another narrative twist in part four, where it is not only suggested that parts one to three are the product of her own pen but also that the ending of part three is a counterfactual rewriting of Cecilia and Robbie's actual fate:

> It is only in this last version that my lovers end well [...]. All the preceding drafts were pitiless. But now I can no longer think what purpose would be served if, say, I tried to persuade my reader, by direct or indirect means, that Robbie Turner died of septicaemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, or that Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground station. (AT 370–371)

Notably, Briony as an old woman here diverges from her earlier mission of writing a "forensic memoir". Now she suggests that (at least in part), her ethical goals can only be achieved by means of fictionalizing: "I like to think that it isn't weakness or evasion, but a final act of kindness, a stand against oblivion and despair, to let my lovers live and to unite them at the end" (AT 371–372). Concha, for one, argues that the fictionalization achieves this goal: "Briony rounds off her atonement with the precious gift that, she well knows, is available only in her godlike capacity as a writer: not only to free her lovers from death in her narrative, but to make them immortal through literature as well" (Concha 2007: 209).

The idea of such a reparation via a counterfactual rewriting of lives is not as idiosyncratic as it may seem but has become a matter of debate in the context of contemporary auto/biographical writing. It has for example been taken up by Doris Lessing, who in her 2008 novella-cum-memoir *Alfred and Emily* attempts to do something very similar for her own parents. Lessing's stated aim in this work is to fictionalize her parents' biographies in order to give her mother and father their "heart's desire" and to rewrite their "lives as might have been if there had been no World War One" (Lessing 2008: vii). The author of fiction, this suggests, can become a healer of mental wounds – an idea that one of Lessing's reviewers has distilled into the catchy formula of "life-writing" as the "righting of lives" (Morrison 2008). While this idea of the moral power of storytelling appealed to many of the book's reviewers,[3] the ethical claim of Lessing's counterfactual work also poses some obvious problems. The one that I find most troubling is the casual way in which Lessing imposes her own values and evaluations onto her parents' stories, so that the apparently benevolent project at times reads like an aggressive assertion of interpretive authority.[4] In any case, the parents – both already dead – obviously neither directly benefited from nor had a say in Lessing's rewriting (or 'righting') of their lives.

A similar point could be made about Briony's novel – there, too, the benefit that comes from writing the happy ending more obviously serves the author than the people who are represented. Some critics, indeed, argue that Briony's 'atone-

---

3 See Byatt (2008), James (2008), Morrison (2008).

4 Virginia Tiger even labels Lessing's portrait of her mother "authorial homicide" (2009: 24). I have discussed the case of *Alfred and Emily* in more detail elsewhere (Birke 2015).

ment' via storytelling has no ethical value whatsoever but is rather to be understood as an act of self-aggrandisement. As Stefanie Albers and Torsten Caeners see it, Briony's use of a fictionalized happy ending indicates that she has not learnt anything (see 2009: 717–718). The very act of writing down the story, they insist, is yet another instance of "her continual pattern of dramatising and controlling the lives of the people around her" (ibid.: 717). Müller-Wood comes to a similarly negative interpretation:

> Presenting herself as manipulative and selective, Briony is as strategic as she is when she describes the reader as greedy for harmony. As such, Briony's strategic self-critique draws attention to the fact that *Atonement* is essentially a novel about the narrator's protracted non-atonement, underlining her cowardice, dishonesty and desire to dominate. (Müller-Wood 2007: 148)

In my view, the novel as a whole, rather than condemning or wholly endorsing Briony's attempt at atonement through storytelling, invites its audience to appreciate the ambivalence of her narrative act and thus elicits the reflection that Lessing's text lacks. For one thing, it is suggested that the older Briony has gone through a maturing process, which in some ways is redeeming. As James Phelan puts it, "because her [Briony's] narrative so sympathetically enters into the consciousness of the other characters, and because she so clearly signals how deficient her judgments were, McEwan invites us to admire her now clear-eyed reconstruction of what she later calls her 'crime'" (Phelan 2005a: 330). Phelan here refers to the novel's first part, in which different stances towards the events (Cecilia's and Robbie's among them) are explored. The point, then, would not be that Briony's narration does a great service to others but that it represents the honest attempt at soul-searching that the young Briony was unable to perform (which accords with D'hoker's assessment of the confessional character of Briony's 'atonement').

Moreover, in part four it is emphasized that old Briony herself agonizes over the question of the ethical implications of her position as a writer. She represents herself as astutely aware of the charges of self-aggrandisement to which the transformation of experience into a work of art exposes her:

> how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled with, that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her. In her imagination she has set the limits and the terms. (AT 371)

This passage has been interpreted as another piece of evidence for Briony's deluded sense of the power that is conferred by "the godlike position of authorship" (Albers/Caeners 2009: 717). It is important to note, however, that she is

pondering a problem here, not a triumph. Her self-reflexive attitude, as Katharina Rennhak (2007: 222) points out, signals that she is conscious of the precarious character of her own claims to mastery. If Briony's attempt at achieving atonement in any sense is to be seen as positive, it is not because it is portrayed as successful but because the quest itself is worthy. Seen from the perspective of autobiographical or biographical writing, Briony's memoir-novel may be regarded as 'ethical' insofar as it reveals a sense of responsibility about the effect of one's own actions on the life of others, and, more specifically, about the representations, the stories, and the evaluations one produces.

Because of the link it suggests between Briony's life-writing and her fiction, but also insofar as it appears as a *mise en abyme* of McEwan's own writing, the passage also raises the question of the *novelist's* ethical authority: what kind of ethical power, if any, can a work of fiction claim? And how can the novelist do justice to the responsibilities of handling such power? Part four in particular highlights the connection between Briony's project of finding redemption and these larger questions. The metafictional twist suggests that Briony's 'authorship' of her family's fate is closely connected to her 'authorship' as a writer of fiction. *Atonement* is, as Brian Finney puts it, a work that is "from beginning to end concerned with the making of fiction" (2004: 69).

A close relationship between autobiographical and fictional storytelling is also implied in the title *Atonement*, as can be illustrated with the help of Gérard Genette's distinction between "thematic" and "rhematic" functions of titles (1997: 79). As Genette explains, a title can either refer to a work's contents ('thematic') or to the work itself as an object (obvious cases of such 'rhematic' titles are genre descriptions, such as 'Essays' or 'A Novel' [see ibid.: 86]). *Atonement* is a thematic title insofar as it refers to a key part of the book's content – Briony's desire to atone – and can thus be understood as inviting reflections about the implications, the possibility or impossibility of this quest. It is also rhematic, however, insofar as the means of achieving this goal is supposed to be the writing itself. *Atonement* is thus also a label for the text as process, as an authorial performance. The text, then, is presented as an act of atonement as well as the representation of a person engaging in atonement. The matter is complicated further by the fact that *Atonement* is not the title of Briony's novel, but only of McEwan's (the title of Briony's book is not disclosed). The reader is thus invited to ponder not only the ethical dimensions of Briony's literary project but also to ask in what sense McEwan's book itself might be regarded as an act of atonement.

At this point, the polysemy of the word 'atonement' must again be considered. If one understands 'atonement' merely in the sense of 'reparation', the applicability to McEwan's novel is not readily apparent – what should the novel

or the novelist have to atone for?[5] If the word is understood in its older sense – as at-onement –, however, one can read the title as rhematic in the sense that it connects with the current tendency to regard the novel as a genre that can contribute to a better understanding of other people or train its readers in empathy. As part of a performance of authorship it can then be interpreted as a claim that McEwan's own novel furthers at-onement in some sense – or, more generally, that the experience and appreciation of literary reading can promote empathy and social cohesion. This would be consistent with McEwan's focus on the unifying effect of art, as it can be found, for example, in his novel *Saturday* (2005), where the reading of a poem disarms a thug, or in *The Children's Act* (2014), where two characters bond over a shared rendition of the song "Down by the Salley Gardens". The conflation of issues of autobiographical storytelling and novel-writing in the character of Briony, then, serves to suggest that both writing and reading are potentially transformative processes that have an impact on moral development – for better or worse. Aside from the transformation of the quixotic reader into a writer, what functions as a central instrument for this exploration of the ethical potential of the novel as a specific form is the innovative treatment of the authorial narrative situation in *Atonement*.

Narrative Situation(s) and the Ethics of Form

One of the central ways in which McEwan explores the capacity of fiction to assert an ethical influence on its readers is through his handling of narrative situation. *Atonement* thus draws attention to the questions concerning the ethics of form raised by contemporary champions of the novel like Martha Nussbaum (as outlined in chapter 6).[6] As the discussion of the thematic and rhematic functions of the title has already suggested, the novel invites its readers to compare Briony's performance of authorship in parts one to three (understood as having been

---

5 Phelan makes the interesting case that one could see the abrupt reframing of parts one to three in part four as a transgression on the part of the author, who has misled his audience – an act for which he needs to atone (2005a: 333). This makes a lot of sense within the framework of rhetorical narratology, which uses metaphors of trust and breach of trust for the rules of communication pertaining between authors and readers, but beyond metaphorical usage, both 'transgression' and 'atonement' with their moral and religious connotations seem like incongruously strong words to characterize a departure from readers' expectations.

6 See Albers/Caeners, who point out that questions of aesthetics are both treated on the level of the story and in metanarrative and metafictional commentary on the level of the discourse (2009: 718).

written by Briony as an intradiegetic author) with McEwan's in *Atonement* (i.e. the whole text). The authorial narration in parts 1–3 can thus be considered either as Briony's or as McEwan's performance – a double function that complicates the authority claims in the novel in interesting ways.

Firstly, it needs to be noted that Briony's handling of point of view is also an issue on the level of the story, where it is represented as a story of development (see Wolf 2001b).[7] This development is commented on explicitly in the context of her first serious attempt at prose writing: in part three, we learn that Briony the nurse has fictionalized Cecilia's and Robbie's encounter by the fountain and sent it to a magazine – a story that is the nucleus of her later long manuscript version. This first attempt (rendered only in a second-hand version) is apparently written in what Stanzel labels a 'figural narrative situation', which creates the impression of giving direct access to characters' consciousness: "It was thought, perception, sensations that interested her, the conscious mind as a river through time, and how to represent its onward roll" (AT 281).

Later on, however, Briony herself reassesses this mode of writing as ethically deficient: "Did she really think she could hide behind some borrowed notions of modern writing, and drown her guilt in a stream – three streams! – of consciousness? The evasions of her little novel were exactly those of her life" (AT 320). For part one of her long manuscript draft, she chooses a different type of point of view, closer to authorial than figural narration, which contains a large number of narrative commentaries. The first chapter, for example, provides diegetic commentary assessing Briony the protagonist: "She was one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world just so. Whereas her big sister's room was a stew of unclosed books, unfolded clothes, unmade bed [...], Briony's was a shrine to her controlling demon" (AT 4–5).

Narratorial commentary, as this example already suggests, is especially conspicuous in the representation of Briony as a character. It is used both to invite sympathy with her and to emphasize that she is to some extent culpable. Explicit narrative commentary makes it possible to spell out complex explanations and evaluations concerning her motivations and actions, as for example when Briony's eagerness to make her mistaken statement to the police is described: "She would never be able to console herself that she was pressured or bullied. She trapped herself, she marched into the labyrinth of her own construction, and was too young, too awestruck, too keen to please, to insist on making her own way back" (AT 170). There are also comments which spell out other characters'

---

7 I use the term 'point of view' as covering both mood and voice in Genette's sense, see entry on "Point of View" in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Prince 2005).

motivations, like the one which describes Lola's initially reluctant collusion in Briony's 'crime':

> and so their [Briony's and Lola's] respective positions, which were to find public expression in the weeks and months to come, and then be pursued as demons in private for many years afterwards, were established in these moments by the lake, with Briony's certainty rising whenever her cousin appeared to doubt herself. (AT 167)

This latter diegetic commentary again suggests a narratorial position from which both Briony's and Lola's behaviour is transparent in its motivation and in its consequences.

Not all critics who have considered the novel's narrative structure have agreed on the description of part one as told by an authorial narrator, and the discrepancies between the different accounts can be used to shed further light on *Atonement*'s special characteristics. D'hoker labels parts one to three as "narrated in the conventional mode of the authorial narrator" (D'hoker 2006: 40). Blakey Vermeule is more specific and characterizes McEwan as the heir of Henry Fielding, employing authorial narration in order to convey "social information" that allows readers to form psychological and ethical judgments (Vermeule 2004: 149). By contrast, Brian Finney characterizes part one as featuring "variable internal focalization" (Finney 2004: 75). He suggests that McEwan uses this technique in order to "*distinguish* his narrative from the classic realist novel's association with an omniscient narrator", which would be signalled by the use of narrative commentary (ibid., emphasis added). Finney's reference to the shift between different focal characters emphasizes an important feature that is not captured by D'hoker's 'conventional authorial mode': the marked restriction of the point of view to particular characters in particular segments of the story. Each of the fourteen chapters in part one concentrates on one central character who is also the main reflector in this passage (six focus on Briony, three on Cecilia, two on their mother Emily, one on Robbie and one on Lola and the twins). In this sense, the first part presents a kaleidoscope of different experiences of the two days in summer 1935, which is vaguely reminiscent of modernist works such as Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. In sum, part one is (in terms of Stanzel's typical narrative situations) best described as dominantly in the authorial mode, but it incorporates some features that are more typical of the figural mode. If one ascribes these choices to Briony as an author, one could credit her with the attempt to combine a critical, explicit moral assessment of the characters with an exploration of their different subjective points of view – this is the view Rennhak convincingly proposes in her reading (2007: 219).

However, there have also been far less positive evaluations of Briony's narrative ethics. Some of those critics who emphasize that part one is written in

the authorial mode regard this choice of narrative situation itself as a further piece of evidence that old Briony, the author in 1999, is still caught up in her problematic "myth-making desire" (Albers/Caeners 2009: 712). As Albers and Caeners see it, the use of authorial narration demonstrates Briony's desire to impose her own evaluations and interpretations on the world around her, and she thus fails miserably in her ambition to write a better narrative (see ibid.).

This argument once again resonates with the widely-held critical view of authorial narration in general. Various scholars interested in the contemporary novel have raised the question whether this mode of narration is still to be seen as an appropriate narrative form. Martha Nussbaum, for one, suggests that it might not be, depicting Henry James and Marcel Proust as early innovators:

> Not all novels are appropriate [to feature as objects of analysis in her project of showing how fictional works can contribute to a better understanding of philosophical questions, such as how to lead a good life] for reasons suggested by both James and Proust in their criticisms of other novel writers. James attacks the omniscient posture of George Eliot's narrator as a falsification of our human position. (Nussbaum 1990: 45–46)[8]

David Lodge puts forward a similar argument: he argues that homodiegetic narration is on the rise in late twentieth-century fiction because of "an increasing reluctance among literary novelists to assume the stance of godlike omniscience that is implied by any third-person representation of consciousness, however covert and impersonal" (Lodge 2002: 86).

Against the background of this criticism, it is especially interesting that McEwan himself does not actually straight-forwardly adopt authorial narration as the main narrative technique of *Atonement*. As part four suggests, the choice is Briony's.[9] The question is whether McEwan should be understood as distancing himself from her choice. One could very well argue that while McEwan might at

---

8 For a detailed discussion of the development of a bias against authorial narration, especially in modernist aesthetics, see Booth (2004).

9 The shift in part four reframes parts one to three as an embedded narrative, with Briony as the (intradiegetic) author. It has been suggested that this makes the narration of part one to three homodiegetic, since we now know they are told by somebody who is also a character in the fictional world (see e.g. Schwalm 2009: 178). This is one way of describing the consequences of the metafictional shift, but I would argue that the case is more complicated. After the revelation, Briony's novel may be compared to a work of autofiction which is told in a third-person voice and with zero focalization. Such a work, in my view, would not merit the description 'homodiegetic narration'. The point of such a work would be that it was not told in a first-person voice, but from the 'outside'. In fact, one might say that critics who consider parts one to three homodiegetic perform the very conflation that narratologists are always warning against, i.e. that of author and narrator.

first seem to be adopting an old-fashioned and highly problematic narrative technique in his novel, at the end it turns out that he is actually criticizing this technique by associating it with Briony, a manipulative character whose main fault is exactly the yearning for interpretive control.

I would like, however, to turn this argument on its head: *Atonement*, as I see it, reflects on such prevalent reservations with regard to authorial narration in general by tying them to Briony's grappling with her fallible judgment and its consequences. Like Rennhak (2007: 222), I would argue that Briony's ethical project cannot be simply discredited as arrogant or hypocritical, and that its self-reflexivity is represented as a redeeming feature. What is more, Briony's performance of authorship is marked as a central concern of the novel, and as an ambivalent process. In the final analysis, then, *Atonement* neither represents a wholly negative evaluation of Briony's novelistic enterprise nor of authorial narration in general. The twist at the end highlights the precarious character of the authority claims put forward in the narrative commentary.

Atonement as Homage and Challenge to the History of the Novel

The use of different narrative techniques in *Atonement* is one of the ways in which the novel explores a literary-historical dimension. The alternating employment of authorial narration, figural narration, and first-person narration with a metafictional twist can be read as conjuring up an outline of the history of the novel and of the changes in prevalent modes of narration. Different stages in this history are, moreover, also evoked by a plethora of intertextual references to English novels that are centrally associated with these techniques (see also Ingersoll [2004], Wolf [2001b]). *Atonement* thus reads as an homage to three centuries of novel reading and writing.

The eighteenth-century novel is, for example, explicitly discussed in a conversation about Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson and their status as early representatives of social and psychological realism. Cecilia and Robbie, both graduates in English literature, rehash the well-established debate about the respective merits of the two authors. Robbie sums up the central positions: "There's more life in Fielding, but he can be psychologically crude compared to Richardson" (AT 26). Cecilia dismisses this view as a stereotype from a facile "undergraduate debate". She "didn't think Fielding was crude at all, or that Richardson was a fine psychologist" (ibid.). Her own reading of *Clarissa* (which she herself finds boring) serves as both another explicit reference to eighteenth-

century literature and as an implicit hint at an influential motif of the early novel tradition that is taken up and modified in *Atonement*: the innocent virgin molested by a rake, which is the character constellation Briony draws upon in order to make sense of the relationship between Cecilia and Robbie. There are also many references to the long tradition of the English country house novel (see Wolf [2001b: 297]), particularly prominently the work of Jane Austen. Austen is evoked, as has already been discussed, by the epigraph, and also in Briony's and Cecilia's characterizations, which echo those of Austen heroines. Where Briony's inclination to see things in her own limited way is reminiscent of Catherine Morland and Emma Woodhouse, Cecilia's belated realization concerning the true nature of her feelings about Robbie ("How could I have been so ignorant about myself? And so stupid?" [AT 134]) recalls Elizabeth Bennet's epiphany concerning Darcy ("Until this moment, I never knew myself").

A second period that is prominently referred to is modernism. Modernist echoes are apparent particularly in those chapters in part one which focus on Briony's mother, Emily Tallis, and her acute sensory perceptions of the house from the vantage point of her bedroom (her "tentacular awareness that reached out from the dimness and moved through the house, unseen and all-knowing", AT 66). This description is reminiscent of similar scenes in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. The parts focussing on Robbie's infatuation with Cecilia and the 'obscene' letter he writes allude to D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – a connection that is reinforced by diegetic intertextual references, as Robbie attributes his Freudian slip in the letter to his earlier reading of Lawrence's work (see AT 132). Another important modernist (or proto-modernist) connection is to Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, which is evoked by the novel's focus on the perspective of the child trying to make sense of the sexually charged events around her – again with a twist insofar as the 'innocent' observer turns out to be the one who warps and ultimately destroys the relationship in question. On a more general level, Laura Marcus has described the shifts between the different subjective perspectives of various characters in part one as "complex negotiations [...] with 'modernist time' – the exploration of dynamic temporalities and variable time caused by scientific progress in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (Marcus 2009: 84).

Atonement also clearly positions itself within the contemporary subgenre of postmodernist metafiction or 'experimental' realism (see e.g. Tönnies 2005). By adding a self-reflexive layer to Briony's story, McEwan aligns his work with that of other contemporary writers invested in metafictional experiments, such as A. S. Byatt (*Possession*, *The Biographer's Tale*), Julian Barnes (*Love etc.*, *Flaubert's Parrot*) or Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children*). In fact, by incorporating the techniques of and references to earlier periods in literary history, McEwan also

employs a pastiche technique that is typical of such writing. His work fits well with the diagnosis that a toned-down type of postmodernism is typical of the contemporary novel: Bruno Zerweck (2001) has suggested the term 'experimental realism' for works that comprise some of the self-reflexive devices of postmodernism while also retaining much of the formula for more traditional storytelling, such as psychologically complex characters and a coherent and suspenseful plot.

In view of *Atonement*'s invitation to consider the ethical merits of different narrative techniques, as it has been discussed in the previous section, an obvious question that presents itself is whether there is also an evaluative dimension to the novel's survey of different literary epochs. Scholars have put forward different opinions: some think that *Atonement* particularly criticizes classical realism (see Finney 2004, Concha 2007), some that it singles out modernist writing as a target of critique (see Robinson 2010), some that it rejects "the moral indeterminacy of postmodern poetics" (Cormack 2009: 70).

Briony's development as a reader and writer is, once more, a key to approaching this issue, as the general limitations and advantages of each of these types of writing are incorporated in her work: she arguably goes through realist, modernist and postmodernist phases (see Wolf 2001b, Rennhak 2007). Thus, it is tempting to read her trajectory as an evolutionary process, with her writing becoming ever more sophisticated, complex and self-aware – in one word, better. This theory works well with regard to the first step in her development, from romance to classical realism, which is linked with a step towards more maturity. Immediately after the fountain scene, she realizes that "for her now it could no longer be fairy-tale castles and princesses, but the strangeness of the here and now, of what passed between people, the ordinary people that she knew, and what power one could have over the other" (AT 39). Briony's resolution to focus on the everyday and the contemporary is obviously reminiscent of the novel-versus-romance debate that shaped the rise of the 'realist' novel, as traced in the chapter on Lennox.

Later on, Briony becomes a modernist writer and reshapes the scene she has witnessed in her novella *Two Figures by a Fountain*. However, the implications of this step are more difficult to assess. The novel as a whole at first sight may seem to support Briony's own notion that the step from classical realism to modernism is one of progress because it allows her to focus on individual consciousness without judgment or even interpretation. The arguments of those critics who have seen the techniques of classical realism as closely tied to Briony's 'crime' and who argue that her manipulative traits surface in her employment of the authorial mode, support this view, since modernism appears to have developed less 'intrusive' modes of representation.

However, just as Briony's character appears as highly ambivalent when regarded in the light of the quixotic tradition, so does the development of her

writing techniques. It is this ambivalence that accounts for the widely differing scholarly views on the respective merits of the different phases in her writing. With regard to Briony's modernist phase, for example, Richard Robinson argues that in fact, her novella is fundamentally deficient when compared to her realist phase. Robinson takes his cue from old Briony's own already-cited dismissal of her attempts to "drown her guilt" in streams of consciousness (AT 320). In his view, McEwan uses *Two Figures by a Fountain* to characterize modernism as subjectivistic and impressionistic and therefore as "ethically neutered, disengaged from history, lacking in pragmatic reality" (Robinson 2010: 492). Robinson himself does not share this (indeed rather commonplace) critical view of modernism, but maintains that its treatment in the novel reveals a narrow understanding on McEwan's part. He draws on a wide range of sources to show how modernist writing was in fact much more socially and politically conscious and critical than its representation in *Atonement* suggests.

In my view, Robinson makes a very good point about modernism but does not do justice to the complex interplay of conflicting evaluations in *Atonement*. Rather than denouncing modernism – or, for that matter, classic realism –, the novel brings into play different well-known arguments about the deficits of these modes of novel writing only to then call them into question. Every point that is made is destabilized at the next turn. For example, Briony's insight into the relativistic character of modernist writing as offering a mere jumble of different perceptions and subjective impressions is a pertinent point about the ethics of form insofar as it highlights the advantages of a narrative commentary which spells out a stance toward the situation as a whole. But in the first description of the fountain scene in part one, the – also pertinent – reverse argument has already been introduced when Briony realizes that there is a special kind of merit in refusing to take a stance: "She could write the scene three times over, from three points of view. [...] She need not judge. There did not have to be a moral. She need only show separate minds, as alive as her own, struggling with the idea that other minds were equally alive" (AT 40).

The evaluation of the self-conscious elements associated with postmodernism turns out to be equally complicated. On the one hand, the realist focus on plot and complex characters and the more modernist interest in juxtaposing different ways of perceiving the world are the foundations on which the text rests in parts one to three. On the other hand, these parts are recalibrated by means of the metafictional frame narrative, which in this sense trumps the other narrative styles. However, this frame does not fundamentally destabilize the foundation of the other three parts or call into question the interest they may generate on the part of the reader. Instead, the self-reflexive dimension serves once again to raise questions that, as the preceding chapters of my study have shown, are as old as

the genre of the novel itself: what is the potential, and what are the purposes, of fictional writing? How does it affect its readers? In what ways can this kind of writing claim social relevance?

The idea of Briony's individual literary development as representing an evolutionary history of the novel thus turns out to be a red herring. *Atonement* presents different ethically charged literary programmes behind different approaches to novel writing and hints at their respective merits and problems but does not implement a hierarchy (other than criticizing the stereotypical characterizations in melodrama). In this context, the unresolved debate between Robbie and Cecilia about Richardson's and Fielding's respective merits can be read as an instance of *mise en abyme*. It serves as a shorthand to import some of the more specific controversies that have accompanied the rise of the novel, but also rehearsed ever since: for example, whether to privilege the subjectivity of an individual character or the character's place in a large social panorama, and to what extent and how to complement the character's own norms and values with other points of view.[10] As Cecilia's rejection of Robbie's confident summary signals, such discussions are never just about the assessment of writing programmes (which in any case are more often than not implicit rather than explicit and thus already hard to assess), but also about different preferences on the part of the readers. Trying to evaluate them on the same scale means comparing apples to oranges, as the aspects of human life they are invested in are so diverse. Ultimately, then, the evocation of different phases and styles of novel writing in *Atonement* illustrates the inadequacy of the notion that literary history should be understood as a narrative of progress. The survey of literary history in *Atonement* thus constitutes a challenge to contemporary writers to keep searching for an ethical writing programme that is adequate to their time. At the same time, it projects reading as a process involving the consideration and readjustment of one's expectations.

Cecilia and Robbie: The Sacralization of Reading

So far, I have mainly emphasized how *Atonement* complicates notions of the purposes and effects of reading, and especially the ethical claims of literature.

---

10 For an extensive analysis of the rivalry between Richardson and Fielding, and how it was used in three centuries of novel criticism to assert debatable dichotomies such as internal/external, subjective/objective or feminine/masculine writing, see Michie (1999, in particular 166–170). Blakey Vermeule also comments on the seminal character of the Richardson-Fielding debate in *Atonement*: as she puts it, it introduces "the question of what makes a novel psychologically compelling" (2004: 147).

Besides the quixotic reader/author Briony, whose case suggests that you need to be a good reader (in both a literal and a figurative sense) in order to be a good writer, however, the novel also features Cecilia and Robbie, whose reading history entails a more exuberant celebration of the function of literary reading. For these two readers, books provide a shared experience that goes beyond the community of taste Austen imagined for Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney.

Admittedly, at first the connection forged by their literary reading does not seem particularly stable. When the novel begins, Cecilia and Robbie, the charlady's son, have both been to Cambridge to study English literature, but they have moved in different circles there. Rather than bringing them closer, the time at university has made them more aware of the social gap between their family backgrounds. Back at home, their conversations about literature have a strained and formal character.

This stage of their shared (or, at this point, simultaneous) reading experience is closely tied to the view that the academic environment is not a place that fosters deep, genuine reading experiences. As Jim Collins has shown, this is a familiar *topos* in contemporary novels which celebrate the singular character of reading, such as for example A.S. Byatt's *Possession* and Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.0* (Collins 2010: 26). In *Atonement*, it is especially Cecilia's formal literary education that is characterized as a sterile venture. Since she is a woman, she is not even awarded a formal university degree for her studies. Her mother Emily takes an especially uncomplimentary stance on Cecilia's academic pursuits:

> [Cecilia] had lolled about for three years at Girton, with the kind of books she could equally have read at home – Jane Austen, Dickens, Conrad [. . .]. How had that pursuit, reading the novels that others took as their leisure, let her think she was superior to anyone else? Even a chemist had his uses. (AT 152)

The early chapter that charts Cecilia's perspective gives a similar image of her as a cross between the stereotypical idle female reader and an unpromising intellectual: she is described as an Isabel-Gilbert-like character, "wasting her days in the stews of her untidied room, lying on her bed in a haze of smoke, chin propped on her hands, pins and needles spreading up through her arm as she read her way through Richardson's *Clarissa*" (AT 21). Robbie, in turn, does not regard his academic literary activities as particularly relevant or useful to the course of life on which he is embarking:

> [T]he study of English literature seemed in retrospect an absorbing parlour game, and reading books and having opinions about them, the desirable adjunct to a civilised existence. But it was not the core, whatever Dr Leavis said in his lectures. It was not the necessary priesthood, nor the most vital pursuit of the enquiring mind, nor the first and last

defence against a barbarian horde, any more than the study of painting or music, history or science. (AT 91)

What is striking especially when comparing McEwan's to Austen's novel, is that in *Atonement* there is very little critical exploration of the status of novel reading as an institutionalized practice. Although the novel does engage with issues of class in the representation of Robbie as a scapegoat for upper middle-class transgressions, such criticism is not extended to reading and the literary system. In the early parts of the narrative, novel-reading does appear as a vaguely elitist activity, promoted in big houses and at Oxbridge faculties and focussing on the widely accepted canon, but there is no explicit engagement with issues of exclusion within or by means of the literary system, as there is in *Northanger Abbey*.

Instead, in the second half of the first part the significance of reading in the Cecilia-Robbie-plot is shifted onto another, more private level of experience: their fondness of books is closely linked to the development of their love story and especially their sexual passion. This association is first foregrounded in a passage in which Robbie thinks about his love for Cecilia before he writes the fatal letter:

> How had it crept up on him, this advanced stage of fetishising the love object? Surely Freud had something to say about that in *Three Essays on Sexuality*. And so did Keats, Shakespeare and Petrarch, and all the rest, and it was in the *Romaunt of the Rose*. He had spent three years dryly studying the symptoms, which had seemed no more than literary conventions, and now [...] he was worshipping her traces. (AT 84)

Literature here is represented as a repository of fundamental human experiences, which are explicitly examined in psychoanalysis but have left their traces in many great works. It comes to life for Robbie only after he has left the realm of academia, which allowed only for 'dry study', and is thus juxtaposed with the deeper kind of literary experience made possible by a more expansive understanding linked to the 'real world' outside of the university.

In the scene which marks the turning point of their love story, books and reading are of central significance. Before a dinner at the big house, to which Robbie has been invited, the two have a confrontation about the letter, which culminates in their love-making. This encounter takes place in the library, a symbolically charged space where they are literally surrounded by literature: "One elbow was resting on the shelves, and she seemed to slide along them, as though about to disappear between the books" (AT 133). For Robbie and Cecilia, the library is for a moment a wholly private space. Their isolation from the rest of the world is described in terms that are reminiscent of the experience of reading, the immersion into a book: "The library door was thick and none of the ordinary sounds that might have reminded them, might have held them back, could reach

them. They were beyond the present, outside time, with no memories and no future" (AT 136).

This transformative scene in the library is described in quasi-religious terms. For Robbie, it is akin to being given the gift of life: "Nothing as singular or as important had happened since the day of his birth" (AT 137). The sacrament of marriage is also invoked: the library takes on the function of a church when the two exchange their first declarations of love. These are in turn compared to vows in a marriage ceremony ("He had no religious belief, but it was impossible not to think of an invisible presence or witness in the room, and that these words spoken aloud were signatures on an unseen contract." [AT 137]). I do not think it is far-fetched to interpret the "invisible presence" Robbie senses as emanating from the books that so closely surround them. Some of these are literary testimonies to comparable kinds of experiences which have shaped the lovers' own views and expectations of what it means to be in love: "As for [Cecilia], beyond all the films she had seen, and all the novels and lyrical poems she had read, she had no experience at all" (AT 136).

The crucial function of shared reading in their relationship is further empha-sized in part two, when Robbie reads and rereads Cecilia's letters in war-time France and the character of their correspondence is described. Not only has their love now become almost completely dependent on the medium of written lan-guage, on exchanges on a page, but the language of the literature they have both studied becomes their secret means of communication. References to literature serve to circumvent the control of the prison censors and evolve into an intimate idiom:

> Some letters – both his and hers – were confiscated for some timid expression of affection. So they wrote about literature, and used characters as codes. [...] All those books, those happy or tragic couples they had never met to discuss. Tristan and Isolde, the Duke Orsino and Olivia (and Malvolio too), Troilus and Criseyde, Mr Knightley and Emma, Venus and Adonis. Turner and Tallis. [...] Mention of 'a quiet corner in a library' was a code for sexual ecstasy. (AT 204)

An echo of the scene in the library, the passage turns on their head the anxieties about reading as an embodied act that inform especially Lennox's and Braddon's novels. The story of Dante's Paolo and Francesca that haunts these works here (at least temporarily) finds a better outcome: the sexual implications of joint reading that ruin this literary couple become a lifeline for Cecilia and Robbie. In the representation of their relationship, the novel celebrates literary reading as for-ging an intellectual as well as emotional and also intensely physical bond. The link between reading and sexual passion serves to associate literary reading with vitality and an intimacy that goes well beyond Austen's community of taste.

Finally, the passage can also be read as a metafictional gesture: the two literary characters are inscribed into a great tradition of passionate but ill-fated lovers. This can both be understood as a metafictional hint on the part of Briony-the-author, emphasizing her act of narrative atonement, and as an oblique expression of self-assertion on the part of McEwan the novel writer, who thus signals both his indebtedness and his contribution to the literary history he has evoked. But maybe even more importantly, it evokes the position of the novel reader as participating in a communion that spans many centuries, extending well before the 'rise of the novel'. The celebration of Cecilia and Robbie's literary love story thus adds a time-transcending facet to *Atonement*'s inventory of the history of the novel up to the turn to the twenty-first century.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

The experiences of the characters in *Atonement* are described in quasi-religious or transcendent terms in those moments in which they engage with literature. This is true of Briony and her narrative quest for atonement, and also of Cecilia and Robbie and the celebration of what might be called their literary intercourse. *Atonement* in this sense fits well into Jim Collins's category of the "Devoutly Literary" novel (Collins 2010: 223). Just as in the quixotic novels from earlier centuries, however, the celebration of the transformative potential of literature also entails an exploration of the ways in which reading can go wrong.

McEwan's reworking of the quixotic plot introduces a further level to its already complex *mise en abyme* structure. The story of the quixotic reader Briony morphs into the story of Briony the author. The work *Atonement* for one thing contains the description of her artistic development, but, secondly, it also represents itself as the result of this process. In this way, narrative technique becomes part of character psychology – which in turn means that thirdly, *Atonement* the novel can also be understood as a commentary on Briony's efforts as a novelist. Briony's quest for redemption is grafted onto the novel as a whole. On the one hand, this foregrounds the question of what the ethical program of a novel can and should be; one the other hand, it stages this question as one that does not allow for a simple answer. Readers are left to puzzle out for themselves to what extent they regard Briony's quest for redemption as successful, and whether they accept the suggested parallels between her autobiographical writing project and the cultural functions of novel-writing in general. In this way, reading is projected as grappling with ethical evaluations. *Atonement* thus fashions itself as an ethical-philosophical project in a Nussbaumian sense, designed to "show us the worth and richness of plural qualitative thinking and engender [...] a richly qualitative kind of seeing" (Nussbaum 1990: 36).

The strong focus on the novel tradition reinforces the idea of the cultural status of literary reading as an activity that itself has a long pedigree. It situates both reader and writer in a long genealogical line of Western thought and aesthetics. By tying the history of the novel to Briony's individual development, *Atonement* at first sight seems to suggest a teleological development towards a more advanced ethical understanding, mirrored in more sophisticated narrative techniques. However, in the final analysis the evolutionary history represented in the work turns out to be more complicated. The references to the eighteenth-century tradition, especially the epigraph and the echoes of Fielding, suggest an affinity to the quest for social analysis and moral relevance in earlier phases of novel history. This homage to the early novel is also performed on the level of form, in the staging of authorial narration as a confrontation with the valiant but also precarious character of the novel's claims to authority.

On the whole, McEwan's novel looks back on the past of the novel more than it looks forward. There are only very few hints, in part four, which point to the future of novel reading. Briony, it seems, has achieved a high social status through her profession as an author. Her books are taught at school (see AT 366) – a detail that also suggests a high status of novel reading as an institutionalized part of the education system. The final scene of the novel, however, could be read as foreshadowing the marginalization of the novel reader. When Briony returns to her childhood home at the very end of the book, it has been transformed into a hotel. While her remaining family assembles in the old library, she finds that "all the books were gone [...], and all the shelves too. [...] The only reading matter was the country magazines in racks by the fireplace" (AT 366). Possibly, this scene forebodes a book-less (also novel-less?) future in which browsing has replaced immersive reading and Briony's (and McEwan's) occupation has become irrelevant. The transformation from a family home to a hotel – a space in which one does not immerse but is in transit – supports this interpretation. But *Atonement* does not develop this idea further; neither does it explicitly describe the current social status of novel reading as a distinct medial practice. This sort of exploration is left to Alan Bennett's *The Uncommon Reader*.

Chapter 8
The Nostalgic Future of Novel Reading:
Alan Bennett's *The Uncommon Reader*

I close my study with an analysis of a surprise publishing success of the past decade: Alan Bennett's *The Uncommon Reader* (2007), which has received a remarkable degree of attention in both established review publications and in online forums. The fact that this work is, at 120 generously formatted pages, a novella rather than a full-blown novel, and that it was written by an author who had previously been established mainly as a playwright and well-known mainly in the UK, hardly predestined it to be an international bestseller in the fiction market. An important reason for its popularity with audiences far beyond Bennett's usual sphere of influence may well be that through its specific use of the quixotic plot, it effectively promotes notions of novel reading as a singular medial activity and as a nostalgic practice.

The Uncommon Reader features a quixotic plot in reverse, which revisits most of the issues surrounding the effects and purposes of literary reading that have been discussed in the previous chapters. A counterfactual Queen Elizabeth II gradually, as the cover blurb to the 2007 Picador edition sums it up, "discover[s] the joys of reading", with "surprising and very funny consequences for the country at large". As I will show, the novella both perfectly represents and subtly plays upon the new "popular literary culture" described by Collins (2010: 17), reflecting a preoccupation with the benefits of novel reading (rather than its possible downsides) in contemporary medial culture.

In the following, I will first explore the protagonist's status as a quixotic reader and demonstrate how the 'novel reading is a singular activity' argument is constructed through the integration of various influential contemporary discourses on the benefits of reading into the story of her development. The following two sections concentrate, respectively, on views of reading as a cognitive and embodied activity, and on how the novella frames reading as a social practice by emphasizing the special status of the reader. In particular, this part will examine the novella's relation to modernist views of novel reading explored in Virginia Woolf's essay collection *The Common Reader*,[1] one of the central pre-texts for Bennett's work. Subsequently, I will demonstrate how Bennett's text projects novel reading as a quest for social and cultural affiliation. The final section

---

1 Strictly speaking, there are two collections: *The Common Reader* (1925) and *The Common Reader, Second Series* (1932).

explores the ways in which textual, paratextual, and contextual factors contribute to situating Bennett's novella – and reading as a practice – in the context of the development of contemporary media and the concomitant media competition.

The Quixote in Reverse

The quixotic reader in Bennett's work represents a departure from the mould of the earlier works insofar as she is not a naïve young woman but a fictional version of Elizabeth II, Queen of England, around the time of her eightieth birthday. The plot is simple: one day, the Queen happens to come across a public library van parked behind Buckingham Palace. Prompted by embarrassment rather than interest, she borrows her first book. This act is the beginning of a mounting obsession with reading: the Queen becomes a book worm and is less and less interested in the tedious time-consuming routines demanded by her position. The book ends with her decision to abdicate as Queen in order to be able to pursue her literary interests, and also to write a political memoir.

The novella does feature some classically quixotic elements that seem to cast reading in a dubious light, associating it with a state of mental disorder. The Queen herself anticipates a negative reaction on the part of the people around her: she is reluctant to share her new interest with anybody, "knowing that such a late-flowering enthusiasm, however worthwhile, might expose her to ridicule" (UC 46). "Enthusiasm", especially in the combination with "late-flowering", has ambivalent undertones, connoting not just a "passionate eagerness in any pursuit, proceeding from an intense conviction of the worthiness of the object", but also an excessive or immoderate quality, as in the more derogatory application of the word in religious contexts: "ill-regulated or misdirected religious emotion, extravagance of religious speculation" (both definitions *OED*). In some passages, the early stages of the Queen's new interest in reading seem to be characterized as somewhat juvenile or ridiculous. For example, a comic scene exploits the idea that Elizabeth II, a model of dignified and proper conduct, behaves like a schoolgirl: the Queen contrives a way of reading her book while sitting in her car and waving to the crowds during the procession for the opening of Parliament, "the trick being to keep the book below the level of the window and to keep focused on it and not on the crowds" (UC 32). More seriously, some of the Queen's attendants attribute the changes effected by reading to "the onset of senility" (UC 80) and diagnose her "growing indifference to appearances" (UC 81) as a possible sign of Alzheimer's disease.

This example already suggests that the issue underlying the concerns about mental stability is the Queen's new way of responding to social pressures. Her

advisor Sir Kevin explicitly frames his reservations about her new pastime in these terms: "To read is to withdraw. To make oneself unavailable. One would feel easier about it [...] if the pursuit itself were less ... selfish" (UC 44). This perception of reading as being self-absorbed connects rather obviously with issues that have been explored in the chapter on *The Doctor's Wife*: as in the case of Isabel, reading is perceived as a radical claim of privacy which clashes with the demands other people may make on an individual's attention. However, as Bennett's treatment suggests, evaluations of reading as withdrawal have shifted since the nineteenth century. While in Braddon's work, there is a novelty value attached to the idea that Isabel's withdrawal through reading might not just be irresponsible self-indulgence but could also be a defense mechanism against unfair power structures, in Bennett the charge of selfishness no longer sounds very convincing. This is not least because it is voiced by the manipulative Sir Kevin, who only cares about outward appearances and is overall one of the most negative characters in the whole story.

All the potential dangers associated with the Queen's reading are, in fact, perceived as such only by characters who either have a sinister agenda of their own (like Sir Kevin or the prime minister, a thinly disguised fictional version of Tony Blair) or are too ignorant to arrive at an adequate judgment. While the earlier quixotic novels take anxieties about reading into serious consideration, in *The Uncommon Reader* they are used as foils to let the special value of reading shine even brighter. The Queen's new manners that worry the others characters signal to the actual reader that a process of personal growth is in progress. Bennett's novella thus features a quixotic plot in reverse: it is based on the premise that reading, and in particular novel reading, will be regarded as a worthwhile activity.

Some of the book's paratextual elements explicitly put forward the notion that it is meant to mount a public relations campaign for novel reading. *The Uncommon Reader* has been marketed as a "manifesto for the potential of reading to change lives", as the back cover to the 2008 paperback edition by Faber and Faber quotes a review by Edward Marriott in the *Observer*. Once again, 'reading' is tacitly taken to be synonymous with 'novel reading': while the Queen studies a broad range of different texts, including biographies, travel writing, historiography, poetry and drama, the genre that is by far the most prominent in her development as a reader is the novel – mainly nineteenth- and twentieth-century European, particularly English. In the course of the story, her reading triggers an awakening which entails both a sentimental education and the kindling of a spirit of independence. She can be described as a poster girl (presented tongue in cheek) for those contemporary champions of the novel who foreground its ability to foster empathy and critical thinking. In the final scene of the book, the Queen

has graduated from a mainly passive follower of routine and protocol to an active freethinker who disconcerts the court and the political establishment by announcing her abdication and her plan to write a political memoir.

At times, Bennett's novella reads like a fictionalized version of one of those collections (or calendars) with quotations about the positive impact of reading that have become a staple in contemporary book culture and are sold in most book stores. There is a large number of *bon mots* about reading – often summed up in a snappy metaphor – which illustrate different received ideas about its potential benefits. What saves these passages from reading like slightly sappy calendar quotes is that they are mainly phrased in the dry, slightly ironic style attributed to the Queen herself in the book. As they also sum up some of the central sentiments about reading the novella deals with, they are worth looking at in detail.

Firstly, there is the Queen's realization "that reading was, among other things, a muscle and one she had seemingly developed" (UC 99). This idea is reinforced by the plot structure, which serves to frame the Queen's introduction to reading as a progressively increasing ability or competence. The metaphor links notions of reading as a cognitive process and as a physical activity, adding a special twist that resonates with contemporary conceptions like those of the brain as an organ that needs to be trained (as, for example, in the idea of brain jogging). More generally, it highlights that reading literature is not a process of passive consumption but a skill that requires practice (if not, however, professional expertise – the Queen is able to acquire it fairly quickly, through application but with almost no tutoring). The impact of this training is far-reaching and goes beyond the ability to understand complex books. The READING IS EXERCISE metaphor evokes an understanding of reading as a cognitive and emotional training. It thus reinforces the idea that the fundamental changes it effects in the Queen's character and behaviour are beneficial rather than deteriorative.

The connection between reading and empathy is explored with the help of a metaphor that gives the idea a humorous edge: "Books are wonderful [...]. At the risk of sounding like a piece of steak [...], they tenderize one" (UC 105). What this means is illustrated earlier in the novella, in a key scene suggesting that it is the Queen's novel reading that makes her more aware of the feelings of others:

> Previously she wouldn't have cared what the maid thought or that she might have hurt her feelings, only now she did and coming back to the chair she wondered why. That this access of consideration might have something to do with books and even with the perpetually irritating Henry James did not at the moment occur to her. (UC 49)

This scene is strongly reminiscent of Martha Nussbaum,'s views on the positive impact of novel reading in terms of ethical behaviour. Nussbaum stresses the

interplay of emotional response and critical analysis in reading certain kinds of fictional texts, which, she argues,

> is why going to plays and reading novels and stories is a valuable part of moral development: not because it points beyond itself to a separately existing moral realm, but because it is among the ways in which we constitute ourselves as moral, and thus as fully human, beings. For we find, as we read novels, that we quite naturally assume the viewpoint of an affectionate and responsive social creature, who looks at all the scene [sic] before him with fond and sympathetic attention, caring for all the people, and caring, too, for the bonds of discourse that hold them all together. (Nussbaum 1990: 345–346)

The novella's characterization of the Queen's sentimental education stages just such a gradual inculcation of an empathetic point of view towards one's fellow creatures. *The Uncommon Reader*'s special mention of Henry James – who is explicitly characterized as a 'difficult' author and whose works are at first beyond the Queen's competence as an untrained reader (UC 13; 49) – also suggests an affinity to Nussbaum. A remarkably large number of essays in her collection *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* focus on James's work as a kind of writing she sees as likely to "engender in [its] readers a richly qualitative kind of seeing" (Nussbaum 1990: 36).

The development of critical and independent thinking is also represented as a benefit of reading in the novella, and again plot elements, explicit commentary and metaphor all reinforce this idea. For one thing, this effect can be inferred from changes in the Queen's everyday behaviour. The fact that she pays less attention to her wardrobe and accessories signals the decrease of her interest in appearances (see e.g. UC 82). Simultaneously, she is more and more exasperated with the empty ceremonies that are her main obligations as a monarch: "she had begun to perform her public duties with a perceived reluctance: she laid foundation stones with less élan, and what few ships there were to launch she sent down the slipway with no more ceremony than a toy boat on a pond, her book always waiting" (UC 45). Bennett here returns to a theme he has already explored in his play *The Madness of George III* (1992), namely the idea that to be a monarch essentially means to deliver a public performance. Representations of a monarch's struggle to project a public persona are a way of probing into "the essentially performative nature of human behaviour" and the pressures that the obligation to perform in particular ways brings to bear on the individual.[2] The changes in the Queen's behaviour in *The Uncommon Reader* suggest that literary reading

---

2 For an interpretation of the play concentrating on this aspect see O'Mealy (2001: 142–145; quote 142).

encourages reflection on and even emancipation from such pressures, insofar as it allows readers to step back from daily routines and develop broader interests.

More dramatically, the idea that reading transforms the Queen's thinking is expressed in the metaphor of the book as a bomb, which is introduced in a comic scene in which the Queen finds that the volume she had been reading in the coach has gone missing:

> Grant, the young footman in charge, [...] said [...] the sniffer dogs had been round and security had confiscated the book. He thought it had probably been exploded.
> 'Exploded?' said the Queen. 'But it was Anita Brookner.'
> The young man [...] said security may have thought it was a device.
> The Queen said: 'Yes. That is exactly what it is. A book is a device to ignite the imagination.' (UC 34)

The banter about the disruptive potential of reading foreshadows the effect the Queen's new passion is going to have as the quixotic plot unfolds. In the scene just quoted, it turns out that in fact, the book in question has not been confiscated as a possible bomb at all but taken away by the Queen's own staff, who frown upon her reading in the coach as a divergence from protocol. This serves to foreground the different perspectives that can be taken on the changes effected by reading and ultimately reinforces the characterization of the Queen's 'subversive' manœuvres as acts of liberation from a deadening routine.

Accordingly, the main enemies of the Queen's reading represent close-mindedness and narrowly utilitarian thinking. In particular Sir Kevin and the prime minister are preoccupied with appearance, and more specifically with its manipulation in order to obtain and retain power. The clash between their interests and the new-found passion on the part of the Queen is particularly evident in disagreements over the use of language. Sir Kevin's suggestion to "factor in" her reading for the palace's public relation, for example, is ridiculed by the Queen as inane manager talk, since "one effect of reading had been to diminish the Queen's tolerance for jargon (which had always been low)" (UC 43). As she explains to Sir Kevin, the literary use of language is patently juxtaposed with its employment in politics and business: "briefing is not reading. In fact it is the antithesis of reading. Briefing is terse, factual and to the point. Reading is untidy, discursive and perpetually inviting. Briefing closes down a subject, reading opens it up" (UC 21–22).

These exchanges reach a comic climax in a scene in which the Queen suggests to the prime minister that instead of her usual prepared speech for the Christmas broadcast, she might read the poem "The Convergence of the Twain" by Thomas Hardy:

'But how would it help?'

'Help whom?'

'Well,' and the prime minister seemed a trifle embarrassed actually to have to say it, 'the people'.

'Oh, surely,' said the Queen, 'it would show, wouldn't it, that fate is something to which we are all subject.'

She gazed at the prime minister, smiling helpfully. He looked down on his hands. 'I'm not sure that is a message the government would feel able to endorse.' The public must not be allowed to think the world could not be managed. That way lay chaos. Or defeat at the polls, which was the same thing. (UC 56–57)

The realm of literature is here characterized as offering a humanist retreat from the power play of a politics in which success is rated not according to particular content but to outward impressions. To 'help the people', in the prime minister's world, means to stabilize existing power structures. A statement that does not recognizably contribute to this goal to him appears to be subversive.

While this is the fundamental sense in which reading makes the Queen 'subversive' – causing her to question her own role in a public performance aimed at the stabilization of dominant power structures –, the novella also suggests that she becomes politically aware in a more specific sense. The knowledge about larger historical and geographic connections she draws from her books is represented as making her more aware of and interested in ethical issues involved in political decisions. The Queen starts to take a more active part in her weekly sessions with the prime minister by "relating them to her studies and what she was learning about history" (UC 84), lecturing him, for example, about the history of the Middle East. "This was not a good idea. The prime minister did not wholly believe in the past or any lessons that might be drawn from it" (UC 84–85). When in the final scene of the novella, the Queen announces her abdication, her decision is represented as linked to the desire to take a more active part in her country's intellectual and political life, not by going into politics herself, but by writing a memoir which will allow her to take a critical look at her own role in recent history: "Sometimes one has felt like a scented candle, sent in to perfume or aerate a policy, monarchy these days just a government-issue deodorant" (UC 116). Reading, it appears, has motivated the Queen to take moral responsibility and to refuse to support a system she sees as corrupt.

The novella's ending also foregrounds the notion of readers as authors or artists that Collins (2010: 29–30) describes as typical of the new popular literary culture within a convergence environment (as it is also central to the representation of Briony in *Atonement*). The relation between writing and reading is represented as complex, however: in fact, they are explicitly juxtaposed when the Queen realizes that "she did not want simply to be a reader. A reader was next

door to being a spectator, whereas when she was writing she was doing, and doing was her duty" (UC 102). Writing is here regarded as an ultimately more satisfying pursuit – as an activity that allows the Queen to find her "voice" (UC 99). Nonetheless, the close connection between reading and writing is emphasized by an ironic reversal of the distribution of notions of passivity and activity: the Queen's advisors are the ones who, wishing to distract her from the perusal of books they see as a disruptive influence, first suggest that she take up writing. They do so on the advice of a senior official who has been trying to write his memoirs for decades and who suggests that writing, while often talked about, "seldom got done" – and in this sense is more harmless than reading (UC 95). Despite an apparent juxtaposition of passive reading and active writing, the main message of the novella is that the two cannot be separated: reading is the necessary precondition and basis for writing. It is only her training as a reader that makes the Queen even want to become a writer and that allows her to develop and express her own views.

With her abdication the Queen becomes 'one of the people'. The plot twist is already prepared earlier on through the foregrounding of a metaphorical field which frames reading as an egalitarian social practice: "Books did not care who was reading them or whether one read them or not. All readers were equal, herself included. Literature, [the Queen] thought, is a commonwealth; letters a republic" (UC 30). This train of thought is then linked to a specific memory of the time when the Queen as a girl left the palace *incognito* to celebrate VE day with the crowds: "There was something of that, she felt, to reading. It was anonymous; it was shared; it was common. And she who had led a life apart now found that she craved it. Here in these pages and between these covers she could go unrecognised" (UC 31). The metaphor of the 'republic of letters' connects the view of reading as social behaviour to that of reading as an institutionalized practice. The novella thus mounts an exploration of inclusionary and exclusionary aspects connected with reading, which is condensed in the special social status of its royal protagonist. The novella's title obviously already signals the central importance of these issues – which are complex enough, not least because of their intertextual resonance, to deserve a section of their own.

Common and Uncommon Readers

Towards the beginning of the novella, the Queen reflects on her reasons for not having taken up reading earlier: "It was a hobby and it was in the nature of her job that she didn't have hobbies. [...] Hobbies involved preferences, and preferences had to be avoided; preferences excluded people" (UC 6). What is casually

introduced here pertains to the evaluation of reading as a social act: in what sense is it inclusionary or exclusionary? The work's playful title and the slightly irreverent focus on the fictionalized monarch as a protagonist suggest a post-classist view, but they also associate the idea of exclusivity with a type of medial activity that supposedly transcends traditional social distinctions. It is, as I will demonstrate in the following, one of the main attractions of *The Uncommon Reader* that in fact it addresses its own readership as in this sense 'uncommon' or special. However, despite obvious attempts to associate reading with a utopian democratic programme, the novella cannot completely escape associations with more exclusionary elitist views.

At first sight the novella's title refers to distinctions based on social class: obviously, the Queen is an "uncommon" reader insofar as she is not a commoner, that is, "of low degree" or "undistinguished by rank or position" (*OED*). The title can be read, however, as suggesting that this link between exalted social position and reading is an anomaly and that reading is by default a 'common' (in the sense of 'ordinary') activity. The cover of my 2007 Picador edition foregrounds this kind of juxtaposition of the extraordinary and the ordinary: it shows a scissor's-cut profile of the Queen's head, complete with her crown, much as it looks on the coins in UK currency. The Queen's body is not represented, except for a hand which emerges holding a book in front of the profile – in rather close proximity to the head, signalling that the book is not just a decorative item but that serious immersive reading is going on. Queen and book are thus linked, but the disjunction of the iconic head and the book-holding hand has a patchwork-like character, suggesting incongruity. The book appears as mundane, representing an ordinary activity which is juxtaposed with an extraordinary agent, thus bringing the exalted figure of the Queen down to earth, as it were.

This is exactly what happens at the end of the book, when the Queen decides to abdicate and to become 'one of the people'. Reading as an activity is thus represented both as transcending social class and helping to generate a more egalitarian community. This idea connects the novella to the pre-texts foregrounded by the title, Virginia Woolf's essay collections *The Common Reader* (*Series One* and *Series Two*), in which the characteristics of such a community are explored. The figuration of the 'common reader' in Woolf's essays is not only obviously an important foil for Bennett's understanding of the reader – it also in a more general sense encapsulates a utopian view of literary reading that has been highly influential in the twentieth century.

In Woolf's essays, the figure of the 'common reader' is set up as independent from established authority, inspired by a love of reading and critical thinking as well as by a utopian impulse to defend his or her autonomous space. As she explains, she has adopted the phrase from Samuel Johnson, who used it in his

"Life of Gray" (1781) to agree with universal praise for Thomas Gray's "Elegy": "I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours" (Johnson 1912: 485). The label that Johnson uses with slight condescension – clearly, he does not count himself among the 'common readers', even if he thinks they are superior to those fellow critics or scholars whose learning has 'corrupted' their natural taste – is adopted as a badge of distinction by Woolf, describing somebody who "reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others" (Woolf 1957: 11). As Woolf sees it, "independence" is "the most important quality that a reader can possess" (1966a: 1). The common reader is independent in two ways: he or she neither defers to the judgment of others nor seeks to impose his or her views on them. Woolf's advice to him or her is "to take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions" (ibid.).

One can read Woolf's re-definition of the formerly slightly patronizing concept as an instance of writing back, of staking her own claim as a woman reader. The common reader is set up as a contrast figure to an academic establishment – upper-class, male –, which uses the privileges of education and social status in order to exclude rather than to open up a conversation.[3] The terrain of the common reader is the library, which in Woolf's utopian conception is not associated with this traditional authority but becomes a cultural 'room of one's own':

> To admit authorities, however heavily furred and gowned, into our libraries and let them tell us how to read, what to read, what value to place on what we read, is to destroy the spirit of freedom which is the breath of those sanctuaries. Everywhere else we may be bound by laws and conventions – there we have none. (Woolf 1966a: 1)

Bennett's library van similarly represents a space of readerly autonomy, positioned against exclusionary institutions. It is to be found in one of the less representative parts of the palace grounds, "next to the bins outside one of the kitchen doors. This wasn't a part of the palace [the Queen] saw much of" (UC 5). The invitation to borrow whichever books she likes is extended to the Queen as it would have been to any other visitor. The shabby but accessible van is contrasted with the palace library, which is described as a site of laws, conventions and limitations that hardly merits the name of 'library':

---

3 For a differentiated discussion of the complex formation of the notions of 'authority' and 'authoritarianism' in Woolf's essays see Koutsantoni (2009: 75–100).

though it was called the library and was indeed lined with books, a book was seldom if ever read there. Ultimatums were delivered there, lines drawn, prayer books compiled and marriages decided upon, but should one want to curl up with a book the library was not the place. It was not easy even to lay hands on something to read, as on the open shelves, so-called, the books were sequestered behind locked and gilded grilles. (UC 18)

The palace library thus embodies the opposite of the living book culture that Bennett, in the Woolfian tradition, sees as opening rather than closing off individual minds and social exchanges.

A central figure in this characterization of reading as facilitating social exchange is the character of the kitchen boy Norman Seakins. He, it seems, is the only other member of the large household who shares the Queen's enthusiasm for books. The two first meet in the library van, and Norman becomes the Queen's advisor and assistant in selecting and procuring further reading material. The relationship between the two is represented as transgressing the boundaries of protocol – in subtle rather than spectacular ways. For example, during their first encounter Norman corrects the Queen, who is hitherto "unused to being contradicted" (UC 8), with regard to pop culture trivia. In their role as readers, at least, the two characters appear as equal.

While in the tradition of the 'common reader', an immersion in book culture is imagined as an inclusionary process, both Woolf's and Bennett's representations of the reader also pivot on the notion that the engagement with books itself creates a community of readers that is marked by its own type of exclusivity. Woolf, in a famous passage in her essay "How Should One Read a Book?", employs an 'us versus them' rhetoric in order to exalt the reader:

I have sometimes dreamt [...] that when the Day of Judgment dawns and the great conquerors and lawyers and statesmen come to receive their rewards – their crowns, their laurels, their names carved indelibly on imperishable marble – the Almighty will turn to Peter and will say, not without a certain envy when he sees us coming with our books under our arms, 'Look, these need no reward. We have nothing to give them here. They have loved reading.' (Woolf 1966a: 11)

Being a reader here means being part of a particular group, just like that of the "great conquerors" or "great statesmen". Readers, Woolf implies, may not be great players on a politically or economically relevant stage, but they are connected by a specific self-sufficiency that comes from following a pursuit experienced as valuable and enjoyable in itself. By her use of the pronoun 'we' and through her style in general – characterized by Hermione Lee as "deliberately written to be accessible, entertaining and uncondescending" (2000: 93) – Woolf creates a sense of community with her audience, which is invited to identify with her personal experience. Woolf's performative gesture in her essays, one might

say, does not just extend to a self-portrait as an author but seems designed to foster the very community of readers she describes. Bennett's play with the 'common-uncommon' paradigm performs a similar operation: while the 'uncommon' reader Elizabeth II becomes 'common' in the course of the novella, the actual reader can feel addressed as part of an 'uncommon' (i.e. extraordinary) group.

Exclusivity in the community of readers that Woolf envisages also has less attractive aspects. For one thing, Woolf the writer does in some ways seem to distinguish herself from the common reader she addresses, positioning herself as an authority of her own kind. It is hard, for example, to read sentences such as the following without feeling that Woolf herself (not least in her role as a novelist) is, after all, dispensing advice to an audience in a less privileged position: "To read a novel is a difficult and complex art. You must be capable not only of great fineness of perception, but of boldness of imagination if you are going to make use of all that the novelist – the great artist – gives you" (Woolf 1966a: 3).

Maybe more importantly, even if one concedes that Woolf's essays on the whole show a "passionate desire for a shared, common ground of communication between readers and writers" (Lee 2000: 96), it cannot be denied that in other respects, she emphasizes rather than dismantles distinctions and boundaries. To name a particularly striking example, in her essay "Middlebrow", an (unsent) letter to the editor of the *New Statesman*, she develops a cultural hierarchy in which she situates herself at the top. There, the "highbrows" – the "man or woman of thoroughbred intelligence who rides his mind at a gallop across country in pursuit of an idea" (Woolf 1966b: 196) – are opposed to the "lowbrows" – "a man or woman of thoroughbred vitality who rides his body in pursuit of a living at a gallop across life" (ibid.: 197). Woolf's distaste, however, is not directed against the latter, who are wholly uninterested in reading, but against a third group, the "middlebrows", for whom culture, and literature in particular, is connected to status and economic concerns (see ibid.: 200–201). Middlebrows "do not live in Bloomsbury, which is on high ground; nor in Chelsea, which is on low ground. Since they must live somewhere presumably, they live perhaps in South Kensington, which is betwixt and between" (ibid.: 198–199).

Such statements have exposed Woolf to the charge of elitism. As Sean Latham puts it in his elegant analysis of Woolf's self-fashioning as a writer, "generations of critics […] condemn[ed] Woolf as an imperious snob so absorbed in the high-brow tradition that she can say very little to those who do not share her formidable learning" (Latham 2003: 60). The quotes from her essay illustrate that Woolf's typology of the different 'brows' does not reflect a straight-forward classism (for example, she emphasizes that her cultural hierarchy cuts across traditional class boundaries: "I myself have known duchesses who were high-

brows, also charwomen" [Woolf 1966b: 199]). Social and cultural class are not simply collapsed in Woolf's writing – Barbara Caine is surely right when she insists that the essays reject "the idea that intellectual elites were necessarily upper class, and that there was an unavoidable gulf between the intellectual elite and the mass of ordinary readers" (Caine 2007: 372). Nonetheless, as Latham sums it up, Woolf employs "the ideologically charged imagery of social class to represent the cultural life of England" (Latham 2003: 93).

In making Woolf's 'common reader' the central reference for a work which also touches upon the issue of class as connected with reading, then, Bennett positions himself in a tradition of critical thinking that regards reading as a fundamentally democratic pursuit which transcends class hierarchies but at the same time reinforces notions about hierarchies of taste. However, where Woolf explicitly eschews associations with the middlebrow and the middle class, Bennett engages head-on with this stratum of society and culture by exploring the state of 'culture' for a national mainstream.

From the *London Review of Books* to the Internet: Medial Environments and Reading as Cultural Affiliation

By representing the Queen's reading competence as slowly evolving, *The Uncommon Reader* gives the actual reader a choice of different phases of readerly competence to identify with. In all likelihood, most actual readers will be able to regard themselves as more competent readers than the Queen as she starts out, whereas her level of competence in the final few pages may be seen either as a model to aspire to, or even as an unnecessarily involved mode of reading. In any case, by virtue of reading the novella itself, any actual reader can already feel as part of a community of novel readers – reading is projected as an act of cultural affiliation.

Many of the intertextual references seem designed to create a sense of a fairly inclusive literary community. An actual recipient who has read one of these books can feel addressed as part of a community of informed literary readers, and the choices ascribed to the Queen cover a spectrum of different literary tastes. The frequent intertextual references to the classics of (particularly English) fiction seem calibrated so as to address not only an elite of 'highbrow' readers but anybody who is interested in books. Many canonical and some rather difficult authors are mentioned (Proust, Beckett, Henry James), but not in a way that necessarily presupposes first-hand familiarity with their works. In order to enjoy these references and feel as part of an 'in-group' of readers, one does not need to

actually have read these books – it is sufficient to be familiar with the names of the authors and to know about their canonical status. The description of the Queen's process of familiarizing herself with literature includes many intradiegetic intertextual references to books that are read or discussed on the level of the story. Especially at the beginning of the book, these are complemented by extradiegetic intertextual references in the narratorial commentary, which more or less unobtrusively educate an actual reader who might not be familiar with the works or authors that are mentioned:

> [Nancy Mitford's] *The Pursuit of Love* turned out to be a fortunate choice [...]. Had Her Majesty gone for another duff read, an early George Eliot, say, or a late Henry James, novice reader that she was she might have been put off reading for good and there would be no story to tell. Books, she would have thought, were work. (UC 13)

The references to Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* are another case in point: it is taken for granted that this is one of the great works of European literature, and that a serious reader will at some point consider tackling it. At the same time, it is also suggested that only very few people have actually done so. The Queen herself comments on Proust's work before she has read it:

> Terrible life, poor man. A martyr to asthma, apparently, and really someone to whom one would have wanted to say, 'Oh, do pull your socks up.' [...] The curious thing about him was that when he dipped his cake in his tea (disgusting habit) the whole of his past life came back to him. Well, I tried it and it had no effect on me at all. (UC 61)

This mixture of irreverent common sense and literary trivia can be enjoyed both by readers who are familiar with Proust and by those who have at most heard of the Madeleine episode, without making the latter group feel lectured or talked down to. The light tone in this passage at the same time softens the somewhat didactic tone of a more serious literary appreciation towards the end of the novella, when the Queen educates the Privy Council on the subject of Proust and the life lessons she has drawn from the *Recherche*:

> 'At the end of the novel Marcel, who narrates it, looks back on a life that hasn't really amounted to much and resolves to redeem it by writing the novel, which we have just in fact read, in the process unlocking some of the secrets of memory and remembrance.
> 'Now one's life, though one says it oneself, has, unlike Marcel's, amounted to a great deal, but like him I feel nevertheless that it needs redeeming by analysis and reflection.'
> 'Analysis?' said the prime minister.
> 'And reflection,' said the Queen. (UC 113)

The passage indicates how to some degree the Queen has graduated to a more informed and skilled way of reading and again foregrounds a positive view of

literary reading as connected to critical thinking. Moreover, the characterization of the *Recherche* as the product of the process it charts highlights the close connection between practices of writing and reading. The Queen describes her feeling of kinship to Marcel's (the protagonist-narrator and also mouthpiece for Proust's authorial performance) love of literature and development as an author. This reference may in turn prompt actual readers to consider their experiences with fiction in general, and specifically with the book *they* are just reading, namely *The Uncommon Reader*.

In contrast to Woolf's essays, then, *The Uncommon Reader* highlights the extraordinary character of the activity of novel reading as such. Reading in itself, the book suggests, makes its practitioner special. The title transfers the idea of nobility from the Queen's social rank to the cultural status of anybody who is a self-identified book lover. In the different medial environments in which the novella has been published and received, this projection of novel reading as a special medial activity is reinforced in specific ways.

There is evidence suggesting that Bennett's novella has been quite successful in giving actual readers the feeling of being part of a community of (un)common readers. The book seems to have become a staple in those institutions Collins (2010) has identified as mainstays of contemporary "popular literary culture", i.e. book groups and book clubs, especially on the internet. Online, a search for the title yields a rich mine of booklists, recommendations, and comments by club members as well as suggestions for questions to be discussed by other book groups. Clearly, individual readers as well as book clubs value the opportunity the book affords of reflecting on benefits of literary reading. As the book club member Misha Stone, for example, writes on *Book Group Buzz*: "We ended our discussion by pondering whether reading makes us better people". The author of the blog *Rebecca Reads* writes: "I found many similarities to my own reading journey. The Queen voiced my own thoughts about reading, and I loved relating to her" (Reid 2008). The *Fab Book Club* recommends the following points for discussion: "What are the benefits of reading for your group? What are the benefits of reading for the Queen in *The Uncommon Reader*?" (Fab Book Club). As Stone sums it up, Bennett's novella makes readers feel good about themselves in the act of reading:

> One thing I wish I had concluded the discussion with is more of an exploration of the title itself. Of course, it is a pun on commoners and the Queen being uncommon. But the book itself also celebrates the readers who truly immerse themselves in literature, who let themselves be changed and expanded. And my book group is certainly those [sic] I would count as uncommon readers. I am proud and grateful to find myself among them. (Stone 2009)

The reviewer for the *Fab Book Club* even picks up on the way in which the book seems custom-made to appeal to those people who strongly identify with the label 'reader': "'The Uncommon Reader' is [...] preaching to the converted" (Fab Book Club). For devotees of the 'book culture' currently celebrated on the internet – in and through discussion rooms, book group blogs, 'book porn' pages displaying photographs of attractive libraries and book stores etc. – *The Uncommon Reader*, with its multi-layered references to the quaint pleasures and values attached to perusing books 'old style', obviously embodies the *zeitgeist*.

The book's emphasis on the old-fashioned character of reading may well be seen as a factor that reinforces its status as a particularly valuable cultural activity. Its perceived impending obsolescence is evoked by the particular situation of the protagonist, who is not only an old lady but also a member of an essentially ornamental monarchy in a democratic state. Her turn to reading as an activity, however, is cleverly characterized as conservative *and* rejuvenating. The Queen as represented by Alan Bennett is both a quaint and an unconventional character – a characterization that is transferred onto the reader of fiction in today's medial environment.

The association with Englishness is another important factor in this evaluation of reading. Especially for its larger international audience, the novella encapsulates a type of Englishness that goes hand in glove with the cultural nostalgia that is foregrounded here. After all, the Queen (and the Royal Family in general) are among the best-selling cultural commodities the UK has to offer. Alan Bennett's own public persona is another factor that makes it easier to package the book in this way. Bennett, who in the British press has been given the half acclaiming, half condescending epithet of "National Treasure",[4] has achieved a high profile as a mediator of a national cultural heritage to a large audience.[5] While for international audiences, he may not be a household name, his public image accords with predominant stereotypes of the typical Englishman as a conservative yet quirky individualist. All these textual and contextual associa-

---

4 See e.g. McKechnie (2007: 5).

5 Ian Goode (2003) has analysed Bennett's successful documentaries produced for the BBC, *Dinner at Noon* (1988), *Portrait of Bust* (1994), and *The Abbey* (1995) in this vein, arguing that they constitute a "mode of articulating inheritance" (Goode 2003: 312) that stands in contrast to the costume dramas of the heritage films produced in the same time period. Bennett, as Goode argues, "takes up a speaking position that is both part of, yet critical of, the establishment, and operates between legitimate and popular culture" (2003: 312). Many critics remark on Bennett's status as a "cultural icon" (McKechnie 2007: 5), both as a prototype of Englishness and as a collective cultural conscience. His well-received series of monologues for television (*Talking Heads* 1 and 2, 1988 and 1998), his recordings of the children's classic *Winnie-the-Pooh* and his stage version of *The Wind in the Willows* (1990) are further instances of his work as a cultural mediator.

tions, then, contribute to making *The Uncommon Reader* an internationally marketable manifesto promoting reading as an endangered cultural practice.

The work also resonates with more specific contemporary political concerns – the manifesto for reading is linked with a plea for resistance against a privatization of the public sector, especially with regard to education. The library van which initiates the Queen's turn to reading is in the course of the narrative "cancelled due to all-round cutbacks" (UC 25). What was probably once an exciting new project for bringing books to the people with the help of modern technology has now become even more visibly derelict than the under-funded public library buildings. The library van's story thus represents an ironic stab at educational policy in present-day England.[6]

Such allusions to English cultural politics are probably lost on most of Bennett's international readers, and they are arguably not that central to the larger manifesto for reading. They are very interesting insofar, however, as they signal beyond a reading community that includes every self-professed book lover to a more specific second audience for the novella that is, in fact, also more exclusive (or even exclusionary): the readership of the magazine *London Review of Books*, where Bennett's story was originally published.

The *London Review of Books* (LRB) as a medial environment is tailored to giving its readers the feeling of being part of a very special community; one might even say, an international cultural elite. A bimonthly review magazine with a circulation of about 65,000 copies,[7] the LRB, as its website proclaims, has "stood up for the tradition of the literary and intellectual essay in English". It publishes reviews of novels as well as of literary criticism, but also of books covering a wide range of other topics from politics and history to art, medicine, and philosophy. The reviewers are often scholars who are highly renowned in their fields. The editorial style, which prominently manifests itself in titles and on the first page, is usually tongue in cheek and has a flavour of informality (see, for example the authors' acknowledgements in the LRB on Sept 26th, 2013: "Colin Burrow's *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* has just been published. He thinks it is the best thing he has written.") The letters page, placed prominently on page three

---

6 Bennett himself has repeatedly been involved in activism to save libraries, and in a more general sense is an outspoken critic of the cut-backs in cultural and educational programmes – see e.g. the lecture about public libraries he delivered as part of the LRB's Primrose Hill lecture series (15 June 2011, available as a podcast on the LRB website). A written version was published in the LRB of 28 July 2011, 3–7 ("Baffled at a Bookcase: Alan Bennett returns to the Library"). Bennett reminisces about the role libraries played for him when he was a boy and highlights their value as communal institutions, pleading for an understanding of the library "as a place not just a facility" (2011: 7).
7 This is the figure given for 2014 on the LRB website.

and often also extending to page four, regularly features letters by high-profile intellectuals, and often there are whole conversations between contributors and readers that go on over the course of several issues.

These elements contribute to projecting reading the magazine as participating in an animated conversation about cultural issues. This conversation, it is further suggested, is of high intellectual quality, and literature – novels in particular – plays an important part in it. The intellectual atmosphere is linked with upscale consumerism, for example in the frequently featured advertisements for the LRB bookstore and cake shop in London Bloomsbury ("the most distinctive independent bookshop in London: an attractive space where an eclectic and well chosen selection of books and DVDs can be browsed in peace and quiet"), and in those for the Neville Johnson furniture company, which offers individually crafted furniture for home libraries.

The medial environment in which Bennett's novella was first published thus conveys a sense of reading in general, and the reading of fiction in particular, as a practice that can be shared. Reading is projected as a sophisticated conversation, as a thoughtful mode of consumerism, and as the hub of an intellectually oriented community. The suggestion of privileged group affiliation is combined with that of an openness that is signalled through the magazine's informal editorial style – as Alan Bennett himself describes it, "[the LRB is not] snobbish, saved by a welcome streak of silliness, which surfaces in the Letters column and the occasional editorial comment" (Bennett 1996: vii). In the advertisement sections, one typically finds promotions of writers' programmes, workshops, and retreats, which reinforces the image of the reader as a creative agent rather than as a passive consumer. The mix of intellectual atmosphere, upscale consumerism, and social inclusion is epitomized in the LRB website's reference to the LRB cake shop as "the modern literary London coffee-house". The environment and experience designed for the LRB reader thus promotes a fusion of individual, social and institutional aspects of reading explicitly aligned with the eighteenth-century coffee house, the space Jürgen Habermas famously described as fostering intellectual community and public debate.

In these surroundings, *The Uncommon Reader* comes across as an elaborate insider joke, geared towards a more exclusive audience than its international marketing as a printed book suggests. Regular LRB readers will be more likely to regard the story in the context of Bennett's other contributions to the magazine, especially the excerpts from his diaries, which have become a yearly fixture and which create a particular sense of familiarity with Bennett. It is this readership that is most likely to note at once that the Queen's guiding spirit into the world of books, the gay kitchen boy Norman Seakins with his working-class background, is an *alter ego* figure of Bennett himself. They will also recognize the voice of the

Queen as resembling the authorial voice in the commentaries as well as Bennett's own style in the diaries, which is characterized by the same mixture of (occasionally catty) irony, self-deprecation, and self-conscious quaintness.[8] The particularly conspicuous performance of authorship connects the thoughts about reading and literary preferences to the public persona of Bennett the author and central figure in the literary landscape of contemporary Britain, but they also suggest a certain degree of access to his more private tastes and habits. Reading and thoughts about reading, then, are understood as mediating between private and public spheres, and the LRB readers are positioned as an audience of fellow readers who enjoy privileged access to this common ground.

This more exclusive audience is implicitly characterized both as particularly well-educated in the literary and cultural sphere and as feeling at home with what Bennett himself has called his "metropolitan" voice (Bennett 1994: ix).[9] The Queen's reported thoughts and the dialogue, for example, are studded with ironic little asides that are recognizable as vintage Bennett: "She read Ackerley's account of himself, unsurprised to find that, being a homosexual, he had worked for the BBC" (UC 20–21). Another instance is her conversation with Norman about the Welsh author Robert Francis Kilvert:

> "A vicar [...]. Nineteenth century. Lived on the Welsh borders and wrote a diary. Fond of little girls."
> "Oh," said the Queen. "Like Lewis Carroll."
> "Worse, ma'am."
> "Dear me. Can you get me the diaries?" (UC 37)

The exclusive audience at which these jokes are directed is positioned as liberal-minded and unsqueamish about sexual innuendo.[10] It is also a politically interested audience that can be expected to appreciate the satirical stabs at Tony

---

8 In his review for *The Spectator*, Sam Leith has referred to a "process of Bennettisation" typical of the author's fictional characters. The unusual degree to which overt autobiographical references are part of Bennett's self-fashioning as a writer is commented on by McKechnie (2007: 4–5). This tendency is exemplified by many of his plays, from *The History Boys* (2004), which fictionalizes some of his own experiences as a schoolboy, to more experimental inventions of himself as a character (or rather, two characters, an experiencing and a narrating self, played by two different actors) in *The Lady in the Van* (1999), which recounts his own encounters with a homeless woman who lived in his front yard, and the short dramatic memoirs *Hymn* (2001) and *Cocktail Sticks* (2012), featuring Bennett as a fictionalized character.

9 See Bennett as quoted in O'Mealy (2001: xvii).

10 By contrast, a common complaint about the novella in some of the reading group blogs I have come across was that it contains some "unnecessary crudity" (Reid 2008), with reference to a passage in which the prime minister's adviser is explicit about oral sex (UC 86).

Blair's administration as well as more generally at the ongoing cut-backs and privatisation in the social sector, in particular in the area of education, which are also frequently targeted in other articles in the LRB.

The proliferation of enthusiastic reviews of *The Uncommon Reader* on the online pages of internet book clubs or amazon.com, written by readers who praise the simplicity and humour of the novella apparently without having picked up on any of the more complex literary or political jokes, suggests that a story originally framed as an insider joke is also successful in addressing a far broader audience of readers. This may be because in the context of the different medial environments I have described, novel reading is projected as a singular and nostalgic activity: it is "uncommon". The representations of the Queen as a reading character reinforce images of reading as tied to a sense of personal identity, as an activity that contributes to forming a sense of self, and of conversations about reading as well-suited for communicating this sense to others.

Emphasizing Medial Difference: *The Uncommon Reader* and Stephen Frears's *The Queen*

The idea that reading is a singular, extraordinary medial practice is also emphasized by the dismissive way in which *The Uncommon Reader* refers to (or else ignores) other kinds of media use. The protagonist herself is represented as an old-fashioned reader who steers clear of newer forms of media. The internet does not figure at all in the story. TV, as the newest medium that is explicitly represented in the novella, is associated with Sir Kevin's and the prime minister's interest in public relations and power politics. These two characters epitomize the lack of education and reflection the novella ascribes to the political and cultural elite ruling contemporary society. Their dislike of the Queen's reading is represented as part and parcel of their general corruption, which in turn serves to characterize reading as an activity untouched by or even directed against consumerism and commercial interest.

However, there is another, more implicit way in which *The Uncommon Reader* situates itself in a larger contemporary medial environment: it functions as an intermedial counterpart to the film *The Queen* (2006), directed by Stephen Frears and starring Helen Mirren in the title role. *The Queen* – a success both at the box office and with critics – had been one of the most highly acclaimed British films of the previous year and would thus have been familiar to many of the novella's early readers. The parallels between the two stories are striking: like Bennett's novella, the film also presents Elizabeth II as a character in a fictionalized plot, in this case

focussing on the aftermath of Princess Diana's death, the public discontent over the apparent cold-heartedness of the reaction on the part of the Royal Family, and the Queen's struggle to restore stability. Both works employ the same well-worn clichés about the Queen and the Royal Family – prominently featuring, for example, the corgies, the Queen Mother's penchant for strong drink, the summer vacations at Balmoral, and Prince Philip's habit of making undiplomatic remarks. They thus tap into a popular image of the Queen but also complicate this image by imagining her private side, attempting a look behind the façade. Both works, then, can be regarded as examples of the tendency in contemporary historical films about kings and queens to give a sympathetic representation of the monarch as a person with everyday problems such as trouble in the family or with his or her health.[11] This narrative is then juxtaposed with the unusual demands and constraints placed upon them by their public roles.

In both Frears's film and Bennett's novella, the Queen's relation to the media lies at the heart of the story. Where Bennett imagines the Queen as discovering the pleasures of a particular kind of media consumption, Frears depicts her as having to learn how to exercise control over the image the news media convey about her. Both works represent contemporary Britain as a nation of predominantly poorly educated people in the grip of an entertainment industry mainly committed to sensationalism and dumbing down. While in Bennett's work, members of the political elite have not read any serious literature and even the Archbishop of Canterbury spends his evenings watching *Strictly Come Dancing* (UC 58), Frears's film revolves around the central metaphor of the Queen as bait for a bloodthirsty pack of journalists. This image is foregrounded by her feeling of kinship to a majestic stag that is being stalked in the Scottish Highlands and by the representation of the newspaper campaign against her as a kind of hunting campaign ("There is something ugly about the way everyone has started bullying her", the fictional Tony Blair remarks). The imagery of hunting is also evoked early in the film, when journalists on motorcycles chase Diana and Dodi al Fayed's car right before the fatal accident in the Paris tunnel. This sequence is interspersed with snapshots of Diana – a technique that suggests parallels between shooting in a literal sense and 'shooting' pictures, and thus highlights the violence inherent in invading the private space of an unwilling subject.

Both Frears's and Bennett's stories, in sum, employ a rhetoric of degeneration tied to the popular use of media: they diagnose adverse effects of contemporary

---

11 McKechnie (2001: 107) sees the "practice of de-mythologising monarchs" as a typical feature of such films from the mid-nineties onwards. In particular, she considers *Mrs Brown* (1997) and *The Madness of King George* (1994), which is based on Bennett's play from 1991. A more recent example would be *The King's Speech* (2010).

media production and use. In both cases, the Queen represents a counter-example, a figure who in different ways refuses to become part of the mediascape. Her old-fashioned unfamiliarity with new utilizations of the media is characterized as a noble and ennobling quality in both works. In *The Queen*, this nostalgic tendency is reinforced through the representation of the fictional Tony Blair, who is the second protagonist and introduced as a contrast character to the Queen. Some reviewers have regarded the story as staging a duel between conservatism and modernity (see Kilb 2008: 107), with Blair on the side of modernity. As Anthony Lane has it, the film stages a "clash of wills" between the Queen and Blair, "[o]r, if you prefer, Alien vs. Predator" (Lane 2006: 91). The Blair character indeed clearly contrasts with that of the Queen insofar as he appears as unversed (and uninterested) in palace protocol, but is an expert in understanding and utilizing the power of the mass media. The film makes much of the aptitude both he and his spin doctor Alistair Campbell have for influencing public opinion. Lane's pop culture reference nicely captures what the two parties may think about each other: from Blair's perspective, the Queen appears to be woefully unadapted to the conditions of the modern media society. Conversely, if one takes the Queen's perspective, Blair and his entourage can be regarded as ruthless and opportunistic manipulators of public opinion.

However, understanding the plot merely as a battle between two opposing forces means to overlook the point of the film's second part: this is not merely the story of a confrontation between the Queen and Blair as representing the past and the present, but also of a rapprochement – one might even say a political romance. Frears makes his Blair both a complex and a sympathetic character by giving him the ability to understand and admire the Queen's position. In contrast to his wife and his PR adviser, Blair recognizes that the reason for her reluctance to make emotional statements or gestures outside of the protocol is not cold-heartedness but a self-disciplined adherence to her responsibilities as a monarch: "duty before self", as she tells him in their final dialogue. But Blair is not only represented as learning to understand and appreciate the Queen – he also teaches her how to adapt to new circumstances. The press conference in which she finally concedes to the media's demand for a personal statement is presented, on the one hand, as a painful and somewhat humiliating scene, but on the other hand, it also appears as a step towards more flexibility and, thus, a viable future. In the final dialogue between the two characters, the film has the Queen sharing a personal emotion with Blair, thereby to some extent vindicating his desire for a display or performance of emotion.

In Bennett's novella, by contrast, there is nothing sympathetic about the fictional prime minister, and there is no concession that it might be necessary to adapt to the changes in the medial environment. The prime minister of the story is

represented as much less ambivalent or complex than his filmic counterpart. He embodies a political elite that is oblivious of its cultural and intellectual limitations and driven solely by the desire for power. The issue of a performance of emotion and its relation to notions of authenticity is raised in the novella, but only to be swiftly reinterpreted as yet another topic about which traditional literature can impart wisdom:

> The Queen had never been demonstrative; it was not in her upbringing, but more and more these days, particularly in the period following Princess Diana's death, she was being required to go public about feelings she would have preferred to keep to herself. At that time, though, she had not yet begun to read, and it was only now that she understood that her predicament was not unique and that she shared it, among others, with Cordelia. She wrote in her notebook, 'Though I do not always understand Shakespeare, Cordelia's 'I cannot heave my heart into my mouth' is a sentiment I can readily endorse. Her predicament is mine.' (UC 80–81)

The Queen's refusal to play by the rules of the new medial environment, then, is ennobled by the reference to Shakespeare. In contrast to Frears, Bennett evokes a utopian scenario where the Queen does not adapt but instead revives an unfashionable old practice, thus effecting a dramatic change both for herself and, subsequently, for those around her. The readers of *The Uncommon Reader* are invited to feel that they are, in their own media use, participating in this activity.

Even though a comparison between film and book thus reveals the book's insistence on the special status of book reading as a valued medial practice, the reactions of some of its actual readers show that they have no problem reconciling their belief in such a special status with their own fluid transitions between different media, from book to film to internet. As "vanessa88z" writes about *The Uncommon Reader* on the website of *Powell's Books*: "Somewhat ironically, I could not help thinking about the wonderful movie, The Queen. Films about writers are notoriously difficult to make and I imagine a movie about a voracious reader would be nearly impossible, but I dare say we have its sequel in The Uncommon Reader" (March 17, 2008). The association with Frears's film comes naturally for many other commentators, too, as does the idea of extending their pleasure in the story by watching the film and reading the book (as the use of the word 'sequel' in the quote suggests) and then connecting with the virtual reading community online.[12] Bennett's novella clearly appeals to audiences deeply en-

---

12 Some further examples of internet comments on *The Uncommon Reader* which make similar points can be found on a reader's blog: "I couldn't help but imagine Helen Mirren while I read this book, mostly because she did such a fabulous job humanizing HRH in The Queen" (Nerdin); *Booklist*: "In the wake of the popularity of the movie The Queen, this crafty work of satire should

trenched in a convergence culture, who integrate different kinds of media use (not least, commenting on websites) while at the same time cherishing the idea of the privileged position of book reading.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Alan Bennett's "delightful little book" (Kakutani 2007) can be read as an appraisal of the status of literary reading in twenty-first-century Britain. The quixote's obsession is reinterpreted as the "celebration of the absolute singularity of reading [books] as a transformative cultural activity" that Collins (2010: 82) has described as typical of the contemporary medial system in Western countries. By way of its reversal of the quixotic plot, *The Uncommon Reader* presupposes a social consensus about the benefits of reading, and, at the same time, conjures up its obsolescence. The dangers of mis-reading – of morally, cognitively or socially misguiding engagements with books –, which are never wholly discounted in the earlier quixotic novels, have been transformed. Now it is novel reading itself that seems endangered. To an even greater extent than the earlier books, Bennett's novella frames the activity of book reading itself, rather than the particular effects of specific types of content, as valuable.

Because of its special publication history, *The Uncommon Reader* affords an opportunity to explore how different medial environments contribute to projecting different reading stances. By evoking the social aspect of reading in specific medial contexts, the novella evokes more inclusive and exclusive variants of novel reading communities. They have in common that they are predicated on as well as enlisted in a resistance to contemporary medial trends – a resistance that can itself be understood as a trend. Through its nostalgic orientation and its intertextual evocation of a venerable history of novel-reading, *The Uncommon Reader* points towards the future of literary reading as a practice.

---

find an appreciative American audience" (Hooper) or on *Amazon comments*: "The only question remaining ... when the movie is cast ... will it be Helen MIrren [sic] or Judi Dench?" ("Roscoe Street Reader", commenting on Dec 30, 2007).

Concluding Remarks

The works that I have called 'quixotic novels' afford an excellent opportunity to study the close connection between the history of the novel and the shifting status of novel reading. They have proved to epitomize novelistic self-reflection about the medial and cultural practices underlying the constitution of the novel as a genre and to offer a running commentary on the reading habits of the particular time in which they were written. They deal with anxieties and hopes, they reflect on practices and debates, and, crucially, they assert the cultural value of the novel. The works presented in the detailed case studies each register a different cultural climate for the reception of the genre. While for Lennox, in the mid-eighteenth century, there is still a need to defend the reading of fictional texts in general ("[t]ruth is not always injured by fiction", as the doctor assures Arabella [FQ 377]), Austen, only fifty years later, refers to novels as an integral (and fashionable) part of cultural life. At the end of the twenty-first century, as the works by McEwan and Bennett show, quixotic plots gain new prominence, allowing writers to take stock of the cultural significance of a medial activity that has come to be seen as endangered.

The quixotic novels introduce and negotiate differing criteria for assessing the benefits and problems of reading practices. The works from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries engage critically with predominant contemporary anxieties about reading fiction, such as the worry about following questionable moral models in *The Female Quixote*, the link between reading and inciting the passions in both *The Female Quixote* and *The Doctor's Wife*, and the association of reading with mass consumption in *The Doctor's Wife*. What all the works I have analysed in the case studies highlight is that the effects of reading are never just a matter of direct influence from one book to one reader. They represent reading as a process that does not occur in a vacuum, but within a complex system of social and literary networks. In so far as the stories of the quixotic readers are told as stories of development, different modes of reading with contrasting value systems are weighed against each other, complicating the issue of what precisely 'reading literature' signifies and how it should be judged.

Key to this study was the development of a multifunctional model outlining different dimensions in which reading can be understood from multiple angles and by means of different methodological tools: as a cognitive process, embodied act, social behaviour or institutionalized practice. This heuristic differentiation has allowed me to enrich classical literary studies approaches, which tend to privilege a view of reading as a cognitive process, with approaches that are more prevalent in media and cultural studies, and that are more interested in the material and praxeological aspects of reading. The second main theoretical tenet

of my work was that the negotiation of the multidimensional character of reading in novels involves not only the representation of reader figures and plots concerning reading, but also the ways in which the texts hail their own audiences and thereby project different reading stances. I have argued that in this way, the aesthetic form of the novel is closely linked with the concepts of reading it stages.

The starting point for my investigations in the case studies was the cognitive dimension of reading. At different times in the history of the novel, the basic question whether the matter represented in books has an impact on the mind of the reader is connected with changing ideas about the role reading may play in the formation of subjectivities. While *The Female Quixote* grapples with the normative notion that fiction should provide models for conduct, *The Doctor's Wife* develops a minute account of the genesis of a quixotic reader as a person for whom the immersion in fictional patterns becomes a psychological necessity. However, both novels complicate and call into question the basis on which value judgments about such cognitive effects of reading are made: Lennox's work stages the ambivalent character of idealism, Braddon's that of escapism. As especially the analysis of *Atonement* shows, the idea that the cognitive impact of novel reading can and should be evaluated according to ethical criteria has by no means lost currency in the twenty-first century, but rather has been invigorated by the assertion that novel reading provides a special kind of cognitive training.

I have read Lennox's work as an early example of a tendency to evoke anti-novel discourses that focus on the effects of reading on the body – in particular its potential to incite passions – in order to ultimately channel them into a view that privileges the mind of the novel reader. Arabella is portrayed as pursuing a practice with moral and intellectual value. At the same time, *The Female Quixote* projects moral reading stances by way of Arabella's representation as a model (to the extent that she achieves this) and as a dubious character (to the extent that she does not). Lennox's novel also invites a sophisticated analytical reading, in part through the subtle use of irony in the chapter titles. In this way, the novel as a genre is implicitly characterized as both morally engaged and as encouraging analysis and reflection. These tendencies are taken up again in modified form in the twenty-first century examples, especially in McEwan's handling of authorial narration as an ethical and analytical challenge.

All these works engage with philosophical and critical discourses, in more or less condensed and popularized ways: whether staged as debates, for example in Lennox's treatment of Johnson and McEwan's references to the literary-historical debate concerning Fielding and Richardson, or boiled down to bon-mots like the Queen's quips in *The Uncommon Reader*. This is yet another way of aligning novel-reading with analysis and self-reflection. One well-established strategy of promoting novel reading in times of medial rivalry, in sum, is to emphasize its

particular potential to both represent and evoke complex processes of evaluation and analysis. The focus on readers' minds rather than on their bodies that has been criticized by scholars like Littau (2006), then, could be a testament not just to the predominant interest in meaning on the part of literary theorists, but also to the success of this kind of novelistic self-fashioning.

Aspects of reading as a cognitive process, an embodied act and social behaviour all play into an issue that has become central to recent discourses about novel reading, namely the idea that it enhances empathy. *Atonement* in particular represents such an effect as a central goal of both novel reading and writing, but also grapples with its complexities, such as the question of whether there is a particular narrative perspective best suited to conveying an empathetic stance (this ultimately results, as I have argued, in a plea for narrative diversity). Moreover, empathy in *Atonement* turns out to be double-edged: for the quixotic character Briony, a sensitivity towards the position of others at times entails a transgressive application of schemata to grasp their position, at times an overwhelming sense of their particularity and otherness. Over-identification with the other is marked as the more problematic attitude in *Atonement*, while the acknowledgment of strangeness actually appears as a necessary condition for an ethical stance towards other people.

If *Atonement* can be understood as examining the present preoccupation with empathy as a goal of novel reading, *Northanger Abbey* takes on an earlier variant of this issue in its parodying of the sentimental novel and its celebration of sensibility (in the eighteenth-century meaning of the word). Not unlike Briony, Catherine has to acknowledge the limits of her understanding of other people's motivations. In both novels, the development of a well-balanced sensitivity towards others is shown to be grounded in critical self-reflection. Insofar as the novels invite their audiences to develop a multi-layered and ultimately benevolent understanding of the characters' strengths and weaknesses, they also project reading as a quest for such a balanced attitude towards the self and others.

It has also proved productive to consider how an understanding of acts of reading *as* social interactions plays into the question of their cultural value. My initial idea that the figure of the quixote is geared towards exploring the implications of reading as a solitary act – and towards gauging the conditions under which this act might disrupt relationships or limit social interactions – was borne out only in part. Many of the novels do feature scenes in which reading undercuts sociability: the scene in which Isabel Gilbert brings her book to the dinner table to avoid conversation with her husband is an emblematic example. However, it is striking how many of the novels also imagine relationships that depend on shared reading as a special kind of communion. Even Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, in which the enjoyment of prose fiction in itself still seems an alien concept to many

of the characters, presents glimpses of how reading might enhance social rela-
tions, especially in the brief episode introducing the Countess as a fellow reader
and kindred spirit. An understanding of reading as a type of sociability recurs in a
particularly pronounced way in *Northanger Abbey*, which envisages a community
of taste for its main novel-reading characters, and in *Atonement*, in which reading
becomes an intensely intimate bond between Robbie and Cecilia. An examination
of the interplay of different dimensions of reading in the novels, then, reveals the
strong social component of pleas for medial exceptionalism. It also highlights the
roots this contemporary understanding of novel reading has in discourses that
were used to establish the genre in the cultural canon two hundred years ago.

The representation of the cohesive aspect of reading on the level of the plot is
underscored by features that project reading as a way of establishing community.
In *Northanger Abbey*, this is mainly suggested through the way in which inter-
textual references to recent other novels address the readers as part of a culturally
informed in-group. Novel readers are moreover characterized as an avant-garde
insofar as they have grasped the potential of a popular, but not institutionalized
newish genre. At the other end of the novel's history (up to this date), intertextual
references and paratextual elements in *The Uncommon Reader* invite the actual
readers to regard themselves as kindred spirits to the protagonist. By virtue of
reading her story, they already share an activity that is characterized as extra-
ordinary through the motifs of (un)commonness and nostalgia.

An interest in novel reading as a socially integrated and (at least to some
extent) integrating activity, then, has been part and parcel of novelistic self-
reflection since the rise of the novel. This should give pause to commentators who
see the digital media today as instigating a revolution in medial habits insofar as
they are ushering in an age of shared reading. Jim Collins, for example, argues
that in a social media environment, literary reading has become communal:
"What used to be a thoroughly private experience in which readers engaged in
intimate conversation with an author between the pages of a book has become an
exuberantly social activity" (Collins 2010: 4). Collins thus represents new media
in the twenty-first century as reversing what Rolf Engelsing (1974) famously
termed the 'reading revolution' of the eighteenth century, when private, silent
reading started to predominate over reading in public or in the family circle, and
concomitantly, extensive reading of many texts replaced an intensive occupation
with only a few. However, the quixotic novels examined in this study offer a more
nuanced understanding of the communal aspects of reading than Collins's some-
what casual juxtaposition of 'private' and 'social' allows for. I do not want to
dispute that new media change medial practices – for example, features like the
commenting function on e-readers or online platforms tracking the reading
process of virtual book clubs offer new ways of communicating about one's

reading. But what really is new about these ways of engaging with media can only be properly understood if one also acknowledges that older silent reading practices are not in all respects best described as "a thoroughly private experience" (Collins 2010: 4).

My analysis of the value ascribed to novel reading as an institutionalized practice has paid attention to the ways in which both 'the novel' and the kind of activity in which its readers engage are defined and evaluated as parts of an evolving literary and cultural system. *Northanger Abbey* addresses this dimension of reading head-on when the "Defense of the Novel" characterizes a belittling of novel reading as the biased stance of a cultural elite. In dissecting the interests inherent in one kind of institutionalized discourse, Austen's novel is already involved in promoting another one, in which the novel can claim a higher literary status. Two hundred years later, a work like *The Uncommon Reader* can build on the established idea of novel reading as an esteemed practice and pit this cultural status of reading against other medial activities in order to commend its own audience.

An examination of reading as an institutionalized practice draws attention to the cultural evaluations intertextual references imply and project. All novels examined in this study foreground intertextuality both on a diegetic level, as part of the conversation and activities of the characters, and on an extradiegetic level, as a way of forging the already-mentioned impression of a reading community. They conspicuously feature references to works and authors that are part of the canon at the time (such as Cervantes in *The Female Quixote*, Tennyson's poetry in *The Doctor's Wife*, Austen, Richardson and Fielding in *Atonement*, and Proust in *The Uncommon Reader*). In times of medial competition, such references serve as credentials to assert the cultural literacy of both the genre and its audience. They project novel reading as an activity that encompasses other kinds of literary and medial activity (this is especially marked in Braddon) and they claim a pedigree for the genre and its reception (especially in Austen, McEwan and Bennett). At the same time, references to works of a less stable cultural standing (such as the romance, the Gothic novel, sensation fiction, or melodrama) facilitate reflections on novel reading as a popular activity with broad appeal.

The model of the four dimensions of reading has allowed me to identify and interpret the intricate ways in which the texts in my corpus negotiate acts of reading. Although in the final analysis I see quixotic works as manifestos for the novel, they are far from conveying simple messages. Books like *The Female Quixote* and *Northanger Abbey* have often been read as simple cautionary tales or parodies, ridiculing a particular way of writing (the French romance, the Gothic novel) and criticizing their protagonist (as naïve, or fanciful, or corruptible). There is still a tendency, even among literary scholars interested in the topic of reading,

to argue that these works are sophisticated *despite* their quixotic set-up – this is, for example, Joe Bray's approach to *Northanger Abbey* (see Bray 2009: 144–5). As I have demonstrated, however, quixotic plots themselves already tend to introduce ambiguities, on the one hand setting up a target for ridicule or criticism, on the other hand exploring and critiquing the different interests and values that underpin such a judgment. They are pleas for novel reading, not by claiming one specific benefit or effect, but by asserting its special place in media culture and its integration into everyday practices.

Looking at the history of the novel through the prism of the quixotic plot reveals how from its very beginnings the novel reader has been posited as an active entity. This complicates the picture drawn by media scholars such as Collins, who suggests that it is only at the beginning of the twenty-first century that an understanding of reading as an active practice has begun to hold sway beyond the highly specialized discourse of reader response theory. He argues that in contemporary popular culture, readers tend to be regarded as creative, as artists in their own right (see Collins 2010: 29–30).[1] My findings in the chapters on the twenty-first century works do confirm a heightened interest in the fusion of author and reader roles, which is featured in both Bennett and McEwan. Briony's quixotic reading is inextricably linked to her authorship, while the Queen's education as a reader also prepares her to become a writer. However, the analysis of negotiations of reading in the quixotic plot draws attention to the long historical trajectory of the idea that readers actively appropriate texts: it turns out to be an integral part of the novelistic discourse from the beginning. The quixotic reader *per se* can be described as assimilating what she reads for her own uses. As the case studies have shown, the novels do not represent reading as a one-way process, where texts exert an influence on the person who peruses them. Even Lennox's Arabella, who at first glance seems to be a purely passive receptacle for notions and expectations dictated by her romances, bends the texts to her own purposes by reading them as conduct books. In *The Doctor's Wife*, Isabel has made something like an art of mining the texts she reads – and, as her interpretation of *Jane Eyre* or *Dombey and Son* shows, misreads – for their romantic potential. Thus, the underlying logic of the quixotic plot suggests that while texts do shape their readers, readers also shape the texts. Moreover, by conspicuously employing a multitude of intertextual references, writers put forward per-

---

1 For this diagnosis Collins draws on Henry Jenkins's (2006) influential view that in social media, reading entails a participatory rather than consumerist stance (Jenkins's prime example is fan fiction – a reader's appropriation of a favoured work for non-commercial purposes).

formances of authorship that identify them as readers. Reception and production are envisaged as inextricably linked and as perpetuating each other.

The gender of the quixotic reader can serve to link the question of activity and passivity to larger dynamics of social power and control. *The Doctor's Wife* and *The Female Quixote* are the works that most deeply engage with the image of the 'silly woman reader' as a stereotype that discredits both the genre of the novel and its readers as shallow. Both novels offer an alternative account of the genesis of the ostensibly silly quixotic reader: what makes the protagonists more susceptible to the potential dangers of reading is not some gender-specific character flaw but the disadvantages inherent in their social position as women. The novels also gauge in how far reading holds a promise of compensation, even change. McEwan's and Bennett's texts do not mobilize the critical potential of gender in the same way. However, they do explore the extent to which the enhanced activity of the female quixotic reader turned creator threatens the established order around them – of the family in *Atonement*, and even the state in *The Uncommon Reader*. In all works, then, the representation of the quixotic reader as female enhances the novels' potential of exploring the disruptive and empowering potential of novel reading.

The approach to the quixotic plot as a pattern for novelistic self-reflection I have designed and demonstrated here lends itself to further applications. In particular, it would be interesting to compare my exemplary findings on the significance of this pattern for a rhetoric of reading as a cultural practice in the English novel to its use in other national literatures. A central part of such an investigation could be the question of how the quixotic plot relates to a construction of novel-reading in relation to national identity. In the works I have examined in this study, the quixotic plot on the one hand serves to connect the English novel to a larger European literary context – Charlotte Lennox's explicit reference to Cervantes in her title, for example, foregrounds such a connection (and so do the various intradiegetic intertextual references to the European canon, for example to Proust in Bennett's novel). On the other hand, the novels also suggest a connection between Englishness and normative notions of reading: Catherine Morland, in the passage that McEwan uses as the epigraph to *Atonement*, is asked to "[r]emember that we are English" in order to rein in her reading-induced fantasies. Reading is characterized in the context of the nationalist discourse in the late eighteenth century as an example of an 'English' practice, entailing a pragmatic and analytic attitude. More subtly, in *The Uncommon Reader*, the evocation of Englishness serves to characterize novel reading as eccentric and nostalgic and thereby to promote its 'uncommonness' as a medial activity. A comparative study focussed on rhetorics of reading, then, could systematically discuss the role of the quixotic plot in negotiating the relation between nationally

and internationally oriented concepts of culture. A similar investigation could be undertaken to chart the potential of the quixotic plot to explore colonial and postcolonial cultural interactions – Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* (2002) and Lloyd Jones's *Mr Pip* (2006) are two recent examples that feature quixotic patterns.

In terms of narrative theory, I have proposed an alternative to the traditional communication model: with the concepts of projected reader stances and the performance of authorship, I have developed tools for reading narrative perspective as an integral part of novelistic self-fashioning. An interesting follow-up project would be to use the concept of projections of reading stances in connection with the dimensions-of-reading model to examine the self-fashioning in different subgenres of the novel, for example in order to test the thesis that horror story and thriller primarily project embodied audiences. Moreover, my study advances an in-depth analysis of the versatility and complexity of authorial narration for novelistic self-fashioning and self-reflection. Rather than closing down options of evaluation for the readers and thus casting them in a somewhat subservient position, authorial commentary in my case studies frequently can be read as opening up controversial issues and projecting reading as a critical assessment. I do not regard this as an exceptional usage of authorial narration, but as a tendency resulting from its dramatization of authorial performance. My study thus offers a corrective to the bias privileging showing over telling that is still prevalent in criticism despite pleas for the value of telling on the part of rhetorical narratologists since Wayne Booth. In this respect, I see my work as a diachronic extension of and commentary on Paul Dawson's rediscovery of authorial narration in contemporary fiction. I agree with his argument (2009: 149) about the versatile functions of authorial narration in the contemporary novel (in *Atonement*, the introduction of the quixotic reader *as* an authorial narrator adds a particularly self-reflexive twist). However, my readings especially of *Northanger Abbey* and *The Doctor's Wife* suggest that 'classical' authorial narration also already involves complex stances towards the novelist's authority. Further diachronic work needs to be done in order to gain a full understanding of the functionalization of authorial narration and its development in the history of the novel.

While this study has focussed on quixotic novels as exemplary cases, the dimensions-of-reading model I have developed can also be used to analyse the ways in which other works address, stage, and project the cultural value of reading at different times in history. I have concentrated on in-depth readings of the quixotic novels in order to discuss in detail which features can play into these complex negotiations. New developments in the digital humanities could offer an innovative way of complementing these close readings with a broad quantitative analysis of reading scenes throughout the history of the novel, which could be

tagged according to the dimensions of reading they address. Unfortunately, the largest corpus of data concerning acts of reading to date, the British *Reading Experience Database, 1450–1945*, does not include fictional representations, but a new European Reading Experience Database, coordinated by Shafquat Towheed, is currently in planning as part of the project "Reading in Europe: Contemporary Issues in Historical and Comparative Perspectives" (funded by the French National Research Agency and launched in 2014) and may cast a wider net.

Alan Bennett's *The Uncommon Reader* suggests that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, all novel readers have become quixotic readers of sorts: misfits whose experience with books shows an anachronistic attitude towards media. The work's success, however, indicates not only that novel reading is still a popular pastime but that 'being a novel reader' is a label with high identificatory potential. Writing its readers continues to be a successful preoccupation of the novel genre.

Works Cited

Adelman, Richard, *Idleness, Contemplation and the Aesthetic: 1750–1830*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.

Alber, Jan, "Pre-Postmodernist Manifestations of the Unnatural: Instances of Expanded Consciousness in 'Omniscient' Narration and Reflector-Mode Narratives", in: *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 61.2/2013, pp. 137–153.

Albers, Stefanie/Torsten Caeners, "The Poetics and Aesthetics of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*", in: *English Studies,* 90.6/2009, pp. 707–720.

Altenberg, Tilmann/Klaus Meyer-Minnemann (eds.), *Europäische Dimensionen des Don Quijote in Literatur, Kunst, Film und Musik*, Hamburg: Hamburg UP, 2007.

Alter, Robert, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975.

Ardila, J.A.G. (ed.), *The Cervantean Heritage: Reception and Influence of Cervantes in Britain*, London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2009a.

Ardila, J.A.G., "The Influence and Reception of Cervantes in Britain, 1607–2005", in: J.A.G. Ardila (ed.), *The Cervantean Heritage: Reception and Influence of Cervantes in Britain*, London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2009b, pp. 2–31.

Armas Wilson, Diana de, "Editor's Introduction", in: Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote*, edited by Diana de Armas Wilson, New York, NY: Norton, 1999, pp. vii–xvi.

Armstrong, Nancy, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.

Armstrong, Nancy, "The Gothic Austen", in: Claudia L. Johnson/Clara Tuite (eds.), *A Companion to Jane Austen,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 237–247.

Ascarelli, Miriam, "A Feminist Connection: Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft", in: *Persuasions Online*, 25.1/2004.

Austen, Jane, *Sense and Sensibility*, edited by Ros Ballaster, London: Penguin, 2003 [1811].

Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice*, edited by Vivien Jones, London: Penguin, 2003 [1813].

Austen, Jane, *Mansfield Park*, edited by Kathryn Sutherland, London: Penguin, 2003 [1814].

Austen, Jane, *Emma*, edited by Fiona Stafford, London: Penguin, 2003 [1815].

Austen, Jane, *Northanger Abbey*, edited by Marilyn Butler, London: Penguin, 2003 [1818].

Austen, Jane, *Persuasion*, edited by Gillian Beer, London: Penguin, 2003 [1818].

Austin, Alfred, "The Vice of Reading", in: *Temple Bar,* 42/1874, pp. 251–257.

Babauta, Leo, "How to Read More: A Lover's Guide", in: *Zen Habits* (blog), October 3, 2011, http://zenhabits.net/read (accessed November 1, 2015).

Bach, Ulrich, "Oral Rhetoric in Writings for a Mixed Literate and Illiterate Audience", in: *Poetics*, 18/1989, pp. 257–270.

Barbauld, Anna Letitia, "On the Origin and Progress of Novel-Writing", in: Anna Letitia Barbauld (ed.), *The British Novelists*, Vol. 1, London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1810, pp. 1–62.

Barnes, Julian, *Flaubert's Parrot*, London: Cape, 1984.

Barnes, Julian, *Love, etc.*, London: Cape, 2000.

Barrett, Eaton Stannard, *The Heroine or, Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader*, edited by Avril Horner/Sue Zlosnik, Richmond, VA: Valancourt, 2011 [1813].

Baudelaire, Charles, "*Madame Bovary*, by Gustave Flaubert", in: Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, edited by Margaret Cohen, translated by Eleanor Marx Aveling/Paul de Man, New York, NY: Norton Critical Edition, 2005 [1856/1857], pp. 403–411.

Benedict, Barbara M., "The Trouble with Things: Objects and Commodification of Sociability", in: Claudia L. Johnson/Clara Tuite (eds.), *A Companion to Jane Austen,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 343–354.

Benedict, Barbara M./Deirdre Le Faye, "Introduction", in: Barbara M. Benedict/Deidre Le Faye (eds.), *Jane Austen:* Northanger Abbey, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006, pp. xxiii–lxi.

Bennett, Alan, *The Madness of King George III,* London: Faber, 1992.

Bennett, Alan, *Writing Home: Autobiographical Essays*, London: Faber and Faber, 1994.

Bennett, Alan, "Foreword", in: Jane Hindle (ed.), *The London Review of Books: An Anthology*, London: Verso, 1996, p. vii.

Bennett, Alan, *The Lady in the Van*, London: Profile Books, 1999.

Bennett, Alan, *The History Boys*, London: Faber and Faber, 2004.

Bennett, Alan, *The Uncommon Reader*, New York, NY: Picador, 2007.

Bennett, Alan, "Baffled at the Bookcase: Alan Bennett Returns to the Library", in: *London Review of Books*, 33.15/2011, pp. 3–7.

Bennett, Alan, *Hymn and Cocktail Sticks*, London: Faber and Faber, 2012.

Bennett, Andrew (ed.), *Readers and Reading*, London: Longman, 1995.

Berensmeyer, Ingo/Gert Buelens/Marysa Demoor (eds.), "Authorship as Cultural Performance", special issue, *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 60.1/2012a.

Berensmeyer, Ingo, "Authorship as Cultural Performance: New Perspectives in Authorship Studies", in: Ingo Berensmeyer/Gert Buelens/Marysa Demoor (eds.), "Authorship as Cultural Performance", special issue, *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 60.1/2012b, pp. 5–29.

Birke, Dorothee, *Memory's Fragile Power: Crises of Memory, Identity and Narrative in Contemporary British Novels*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008.

Birke, Dorothee, "Doris Lessing's *Alfred and Emily* and the Ethics of Narrated Memory", in: Hermann Blume/Christoph Leitgeb/Michael Rössner (eds.), *Narrated Communities, Narrated Realities: Narrative as Cognitive Processing and Cultural Practice*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2015, pp. 141–151.

Birke, Dorothee/Stella Butter, "The Politics of 'Realism': Analyzing Discourses on Contemporary Literature and TV", in: Monika Fludernik/Benjamin Kohlmann (eds.), *Anglistentag 2011 Freiburg: Proceedings*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2012, pp. 385–396.

Birke, Dorothee/Tilmann Köppe (eds.), *Author and Narrator*: *Transdisciplinary Contributions to a Narratological Debate*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015.

Birkerts, Sven, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, New York, NY: Faber and Faber, 1994.

Blaicher, Günther, "'The Improvement of the Mind': Auffassungen vom Lesen bei John Locke, Richard Steele und Joseph Addison", in: Paul Goetsch (ed.), *Lesen und Schreiben im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert: Studien zu ihrer Bewertung in Deutschland, England, Frankreich*, Tübingen: Narr, 1994, pp. 91–108.

Blaicher, Günther, "Spinne und Chamäleon: Auffassungen vom Lesen in der englischen Romantik", in: Hans Hunfeld (ed.), *Wozu Wissenschaft heute? Ringvorlesung zu Ehren von Roland Hagenbüchle*, Tübingen: Narr, 1997, pp. 25–37.

Blewett, David (ed.), "Reconsidering the Rise of the Novel", special issue, *Eighteenth Century Fiction*, 12.2–3/2000.

Bonaparte, Felicia, "Conjecturing Possibilities: Reading and Misreading Texts in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*", in: *Studies in the Novel*, 37.2/2005, pp. 141–161.

Booth, Wayne C., "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*", in: Wolfgang Iser (ed.), *Henry Fielding und der englische Roman des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972, pp. 408–436. Originally published in: *PMLA*, 67.2/1952, pp. 163–185.

Booth, Wayne C.*, The Rhetoric of Fiction: The Quest for Effective Communication,* Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004 [1961].

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979.

Bradbrook, Frank W., *Jane Austenand her Predecessors*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966.

Bradbury, Ray, *Fahrenheit 451*, London: Hart-Davis, 1953.

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, *Lady Audley's Secret*, edited by David Skilton, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987 [1862].

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, *Aurora Floyd*, edited by P. D. Edwards, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999 [1863].

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, *John Marchmont's Legacy*, edited by Toru Sasaki, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999 [1863].

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, *The Doctor's Wife*, edited by Lyn Pykett, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998 [1864].

Bradshaw, David (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

Brantlinger, Patrick, "What is 'Sensational' about the 'Sensation Novel'?", in: *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37.1/1982, pp. 1–28.

Brantlinger, Patrick, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1998.

Bray, Joe, *The Female Reader in the English Novel: From Burney to Austen*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2009.

Bredella, Lothar/Franz-Joseph Meißner/Ansgar Nünning/Dietmar Rösler (eds.), *Wie ist Fremdverstehen lehr- und lernbar? Vorträge aus dem Graduiertenkolleg "Didaktik des Fremdverstehens"*, Tübingen: Narr, 2000.

Broich, Ulrich/Manfred Pfister, *Intertextualität: Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985.

Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre*, edited by Stevie Davies, London: Penguin, 2001 [1847].

Brontë, Charlotte, *Villette*, edited by Mark Lilly, London: Penguin, 1985 [1853].

Brosch, Renate (ed.), "Focus on Reception and Reader Response", special issue, *Anglistik*, 24.2/2013a.

Brosch, Renate, "Introduction", in: Renate Brosch (ed.), "Focus on Reception and Reader Response", special issue, *Anglistik*, 24.2/2013b, pp. 7–16.

Bruner, Jerome, "The 'Remembered' Self", in: Ulric Neisser/Robyn Fivush (eds.), *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994, pp. 41–54.

Brunton, Mary, *Self-Control*, edited by Sara Maitland, London: Pandora Press, 1986 [1811].

Bulwer-Lytton, Edward, *The Caxtons*, London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1849.

Burgess, Miranda, "Sentiment and Sensibility: Austen, Feeling, and Print Culture", in: Claudia L. Johnson/Clara Tuite (eds.), *A Companion to Jane Austen,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 226–236.

Burney, Fanny, *Cecilia*, edited by Judy Simons, London: Virago, 1986 [1782].

Burney, Fanny, *Camilla*, edited by Edward Bloom, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972 [1796].

Burt, Daniel, *The Novel 100: A Ranking of the Greatest Novels of All Time*, New York, NY: Facts on File, 2004.

Butler, Marilyn, "Introduction", in: Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, edited by Marilyn Butler, London: Penguin, 1995, pp. xi–l.

Byatt, Antonia S., *Possession*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1990.

Byatt, Antonia S., *The Biographer's Tale*, London: Chatto & Windus, 2000.

Byatt, Antonia S., "The Mother of Her Dreams", in: *Financial Times*, May 10, 2008, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/b3886de6-1d55-11dd-82ae-000077b07658.html#axzz2MBmmrXQV (accessed February 26, 2013).

Caine, Barbara, "Stefan Collini, Virginia Woolf, and the Question of Intellectuals in Britain", in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68.3/2007, pp. 369–373.

Carlile, Susan (ed.), *Masters of the Marketplace: British Women Novelists of the 1750s,* Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh UP, 2011a.

Carlile, Susan, "Introduction", in: Susan Carlile (ed.), *Masters of the Marketplace: British Women Novelists of the 1750s,* Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh UP, 2011b, pp. 11–27.

Caruth, Cathy, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.

Castle, Terry, "Introduction", in: Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, edited by Bonamy Dobrée, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998 [1794], pp. vii–xxvi.

Cavalié, Elsa, "'She Would Rewrite the Past so that the Guilty Became the Innocent': Briony's House of Fiction", in: Pascal Nicklas (ed.), *Ian McEwan: Art and Politics*, Anglistik & Englischunterricht, Vol. 73, Heidelberg: Winter, 2009, pp. 119–135.

Cervantes, Miguel de, *Don Quijote*, edited by Diana de Armas Wilson, translated by Burton Raffel, New York, NY: Norton, 1999 [1605; 1615].

Chartier, Roger, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane, Cambridge: Polity, 1994 [1992].

Chartier, Roger/Guglielmo Cavallo (eds.), *Die Welt des Lesens: Von der Schriftrolle zum Bildschirm*, translated by H. Jochen Bußmann/Ulrich Enderwitz/Klaus Jöken/Bernd Schwibs/Martina Kemper, Frankfurt: Campus, 1999a [1995].

Chartier, Roger/Guglielmo Cavallo, "Einleitung", in: Roger Chartier/Guglielmo Cavallo (eds.), *Die Welt des Lesens: Von der Schriftrolle zum Bildschirm*, translated by H. Jochen Bußmann/Ulrich Enderwitz/Klaus Jöken/Bernd Schwibs/Martina Kemper, Frankfurt: Campus, 1999b [1995], pp. 9–57.

Chatman, Seymour, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978.

Cohen, Margaret, "Introduction to the Second Edition", in: Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, edited by Margaret Cohen, translated by Eleanor Marx Aveling/Paul de Man, New York, NY: Norton Critical Edition, 2005 [1856/1857], pp. ix–xix.

Cohn, Dorrit, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978.

Collins, Jim, *Bring on the Books for Everybody: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture*, Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010.

Colman, George, *Polly Honeycombe*, London: Becket and Davies, 1760.

Concha, Ángeles de la, "Unravelling Conventions; or, the Ethics of Deconstruction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*", in: Susana Onega Jaén/Jean-Michel Ganteau (eds.), *The Ethical Component in Experimental British Fiction since the 1960's*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2007, pp. 191–209.

Congreve, William, *Incognita or Love and Duty Reconcil'd*, edited by H. F. B. Brett-Smith, Oxford: Blackwell, 1922 [1692].

Connor, John Joseph, *The Quixotic Novel from the Point of View of the Narrative*, Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 1977.

Conrad, Joseph, *Heart of Darkness*, edited by Owen Knowles, London: Penguin, 2007 [1899].

Conrad, Joseph, *Lord Jim*, edited by John Stape, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012 [1900].

Cormack, Alistair, "Postmodernism and the Ethics of Fiction in *Atonement*", in: Sebastian Groes (ed.), *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, London: Continuum, 2009, pp. 70–82.

Culler, Jonathan, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.

"Customer Comments on *The Uncommon Reader*", in: *Powell's Books*, http://www.powells.com/biblio/9780374280963?page=customercomments#page (accessed February 26, 2014).

Dahms, Andrea Elisabeth, *Erlesene Welten: Der fiktive Leser in der modernen Literatur. Karl Philipp Moritz – Gottfried Keller – Peter Handke,* Frankfurt: Lang, 2005.

Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, translated by Charles Singleton, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1970 [1320].

Darnton, Robert, "First Steps Toward a History of Reading", in: James L. Machor & Philip Goldstein (eds.), *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2001, pp. 160–179.

Davis, Lennard J., *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction,* London: Methuen, 1987.

Dawson, Paul, "The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction", *Narrative* 17.2/2009, pp. 143–161.

DeMaria, Robert, *Samuel Johnson and the Life of Reading*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

Detmers, Ines, "'Erlesene Bilder' des Don Quijote: Zur gattungsreflexiven Funktion von Interfiguralität in post-modernen Graphic Novels", in: Ines Detmers/Wolfgang G. Müller (eds.), *Don Quijotes intermediale Nachleben. Don Quixote's Intermedial Afterlives,* Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2010, pp. 289–314.

Detmers, Ines/Wolfgang G. Müller (eds.), *Don Quijotes intermediale Nachleben. Don Quixote's Intermedial Afterlives,* Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2010a.

Detmers, Ines/Wolfgang G. Müller, "Einleitung", in: Ines Detmers/Wolfgang G. Müller (eds.), *Don Quijotes intermediale Nachleben. Don Quixote's Intermedial Afterlives,* Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2010b, pp. 7–12.

D'hoker, Elke, "Confessions and Atonement in Contemporary Fiction: J. M. Coetzee, John Banville, and Ian McEwan", in: *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction,* 48.1/2006, pp. 31–43.

Dickens, Charles, *Dombey and Son*, edited by Alan Horsman, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974 [1848].

Dickens, Charles, *David Copperfield*, edited by Nina Burgis, Oxford: OUP, 2008 [1850].

Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House*, edited by George Ford, New York: Norton, 1977 [1853].

Dickens, Charles, *Great Expectations*, edited by Margaret Cardwell, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993 [1861].

Doody, Margaret Anne, "Introduction", in: Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote or The Adventures of Arabella*, edited by Margaret Dalziel, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989 [1752], pp. xi–xxxii.

Doody, Margaret Anne, *The True Story of the Novel*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1996.

Doody, Margaret Anne, "Turns of Speech and Figures of Mind", in: Claudia L. Johnson/Clara Tuite (eds.), *A Companion to Jane Austen,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 165–184.

Dryden, John, "Dedication of the Æneis to the Lord Marquess of Normanby", in: William Frost/Alan Roper (eds.), *The Works of John Dryden*, Vol. 5, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987 [1697], pp. 267–341.

Eakin, Paul John, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1999.

Eco, Umberto, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts,* Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1984 [1979].

Eco, Umberto, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*, translated by Geoffrey Brock, San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 2005.

Edgeworth, Maria, "Angelina", in: *Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth*, Vol. 1, London: Routledge, 1893 [1801], pp. 221–282.

Edgeworth, Maria, *Belinda*, edited by Siobhán Kilfeather, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003 [1801].

Edwards, P. D., "French Realism Englished: The Case of M. E. Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife*", in: Penny Gay/Judith Johnston/Catherine Waters (eds.), *Victorian Turns, NeoVictorian Returns: Essays on Fiction and Culture,* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2008, pp. 113–123.

Eliot, George, *Adam Bede,* edited by Carol A. Martin, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001 [1859].

Eliot, George, *The Mill on the Floss*, edited by A. S. Byatt, London: Penguin, 2003 [1860].

Emsley, Sarah B., *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues,* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Engelsing, Rolf, *Analphabetentum und Lektüre – Zur Sozialgeschichte des Lesens in Deutschland zwischen feudaler und industrieller Gesellschaft*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1973.

Engelsing, Rolf, *Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500–1800*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 1974.

Ertler, Klaus-Dieter/Andrea Maria Humpl (eds.), *Der widerspenstige Klassiker: Don Quijote im 18. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt: Lang 2007.

Fab Book Club, "*The Uncommon Reader* by Alan Bennett", in: *Fab Book Club Recommendations*, http://www.fab-bookclub-recommendations.com/the-uncommon-reader.html (accessed August 5, 2013).

Fergus, Jan, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel:* Northanger Abbey*,* Sense and Sensibility *and* Pride and Prejudice, London: Macmillan, 1983.

Fergus, Jan, "Women Readers: A Case Study", in: Vivien Jones (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1700–1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000, pp. 155–176.

Ferris, Ina, "Transformations of the Novel – II", in: James Chandler (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 473–489.

Fielding, Henry, *Joseph Andrews*, edited by Homer Goldberg, New York: Norton, 1987 [1742].

Fielding, Henry, *The History of Tom Jones: A Foundling*, Vol. 1–2, edited by Fredson Bowers, Oxford: Clarendon, 1974 [1749].

Fielding, Henry, "Review of Lennox' *The Female Quixote*", in: Ioan Williams (ed.), *The Criticism of Henry Fielding*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, pp. 191–194. Originally published in: *The Covent Garden Journal*, 24/1752.

Fielding, Sarah, *The Adventures of David Simple and Volume the Last*, edited by Peter Sabor, Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1998 [1744].

Finch, Patricia/John J. Allen, "Don Quijote Across the Centuries", in: Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote*, edited by Diana de Armas Wilson, New York, NY: Norton, 1999, pp. 767–774.

Finney, Brian, "Briony's Stand Against Oblivion: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*", in: *Journal of Modern Literature,* 27.3/2004, pp. 68–82.

Flaubert, Gustave, *Madame Bovary: Mœurs de Province*, Paris: Gallimard, 1972 [1856/1857].

Flaubert, Gustave, *Madame Bovary*, edited by Margaret Cohen, translated by Eleanor Marx Aveling/Paul de Man, New York, NY: Norton Critical Edition, 2005 [1856/1857].

Flint, Kate, *The Woman Reader: 1837–1914,* Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.

Flint, Kate, "Women, Men and the Reading of *Vanity Fair*", in: James Raven/Helen Small/Naomi Tadmor (eds.), *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996, pp. 246–262.

Fludernik, Monika, "The Diachronization of Narratology", in: *Narrative,* 11.3/2003a, pp. 331–348.

Fludernik, Monika, "Metanarrative and Metafictional Commentary: From Metadiscursivity to Metanarration and Metafiction", in: *Poetica: Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft,* 35/2003b, pp. 1–39.

Fludernik, Monika, *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006.

Fludernik, Monika, *An Introduction to Narratology,* London: Routledge, 2009.

Fludernik, Monika, "Eliot and Narrative", in: Amanda Anderson/Harry E. Shaw (eds.), *A Companion to George Eliot*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 21–34.

Friedman, Emily C., "'To Such as Are Willing to Understand': Considering Fielding's Community of Imagined Readers", in: Susan Carlile (ed.), *Masters of the Marketplace: British Women Novelists of the 1750s,* Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh UP, 2011, pp. 182–200.

Gabriele, John Philip (ed.), *1605–2005: Don Quixote Across the Centuries*, Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005.

Gardiner, Ellen, "Writing Men Reading in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*", in: *Studies in the Novel,* 28.1/1996, pp. 1–11.

Gardiner, Ellen, *Regulating Readers: Gender and Literary Criticism in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1999.

Garson, Marjorie, *Moral Taste: Aesthetics, Subjectivity, and Social Power in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

Gauger, Hans-Martin, "Die sechs Kulturen in der Geschichte des Lesens", in: Paul Goetsch (ed.), *Lesen und Schreiben im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert: Studien zu ihrer Bewertung in Deutschland, England, Frankreich*, Tübingen: Narr, 1994, pp. 27–47.

Genette, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, translated by Jane E. Lewin, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1980 [1972].

Genette, Gérard, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, translated by Jane E. Lewin, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1988 [1983].

Genette, Gérard, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretations*, translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997 [1987].

Giesecke, Michael, *Die Entdeckung der kommunikativen Welt: Studien zur kulturvergleichenden Mediengeschichte*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007 [2006].

Gilbert, Pamela K. (ed.), *A Companion to Sensation Fiction,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011a.

Gilbert, Pamela K., "Introduction", in: Pamela K. Gilbert (ed.), *A Companion to Sensation Fiction,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011b, pp. 1–10.

Gissing, George, *New Grub Street*, edited by John Goode, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993 [1891].

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, edited by Johannes Diekhans, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001 [1774].

Goetsch, Paul, "Leserfiguren in der Erzählkunst", in: *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 33/1983, pp. 199–215.

Goetsch, Paul (ed.), *Lesen und Schreiben im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert: Studien zu ihrer Bewertung in Deutschland, England, Frankreich*, Tübingen: Narr, 1994.

Goetsch, Paul, "Von Bücherwürmern und Leseratten: Der Motivkomplex Lesen und Essen", in: *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch,* 37/1996, pp. 381–406.

Goetsch, Paul, "Reader Figures in Narrative", in: *Style,* 38.2/2004, pp. 188–202.

Golden, Catherine J., *Images of the Woman Reader in Victorian British and American Fiction*, Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2003.

Goldsmith, William, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, edited by Arthur Friedman, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974 [1766].

Goode, Ian, "A Pattern of Inheritances: Alan Bennett, Heritage and British Film and Television", in: *Screen,* 44.3/2003, pp. 295–313.

Gordon, Scott Paul, "The Space of Romance in Lennox's *Female Quixote*", in: *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 38.3/1998, pp. 499–516.

Groes, Sebastian (ed.), *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, London: Continuum, 2009.

Gutenberg, Andrea, *Mögliche Welten: Plot und Sinnstiftung im englischen Frauenroman,* Heidelberg: Winter, 2000.

Gymnich, Marion/Birgit Neumann/Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Kulturelles Wissen und Intertextualität: Theoriekonzeptionen und Fallstudien zur Kontextualisierung von Literatur,* Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2006.

Hamilton, Patricia L., "Arabella Unbound: Wit, Judgement, and the Cure of Lennox's *Female Quixote*", in: Susan Carlile (ed.), *Masters of the Marketplace: British Women Novelists of the 1750s,* Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh UP, 2011, pp. 108–127.

Harris, Jocelyn, "Anna Letitia Barbauld, Jane Austen's Unseen Interlocutor", in: William McCarthy/Olivia Murphy (eds.), *Anna Letitia Barbauld: New Perspectives*, Lanham, MA: Bucknell UP, 2014, pp. 237–257.

Heath, Stephen, *Gustave Flaubert:* Madame Bovary, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.

Herman, David/Manfred Jahn/Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* London: Routledge, 2005.

Herman, David/James Phelan/Peter J. Rabinowitz/Brian Richardson/Robyn Warhol (eds.), *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*, Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2012.

Herman, David, "Exploring the Nexus of Narrative and Mind", in: David Herman/James Phelan/Peter J. Rabinowitz/Brian Richardson/Robyn Warhol, *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates*, Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2012, pp. 14–19.

Hofkosh, Sonia, "The Illusionist: *Northanger Abbey* and Austen's Uses of Enchantment", in: Claudia L. Johnson/Clara Tuite (eds.), *A Companion to Jane Austen,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 101–111.

Hogan, Patrick C., *Cognitive Science, Literature and the Arts: A Guide for Humanists,* New York, NY: Routledge, 2003.

Hooper, Brad, "Booklist Review: *The Uncommon Reader*", in: *Booklist Online*, http://www.booklistonline.com/ProductInfo.aspx?pid=2058358&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1 (accessed February 26, 2014).

Hunter, Jefferson, *English Filming, English Writing,* Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2010.

Hunter, John Paul, "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Reader", in: *Genre,* 10/1977, pp. 455–484.

Hunter, John Paul, "The Novel and Social/Cultural History", in: John Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996, pp. 9–40.

Hutcheon, Linda, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, New York, NY: Methuen, 1980.

Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, New York, NY: Methuen, 1985.

Hutcheon, Linda, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony,* London: Routledge, 1995.

Ingersoll, Earl G., "Intertextuality in L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* and Ian McEwan's *Atonement*", in: *Forum of Modern Language Studies*, 3/2004, pp. 241–258.

Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response,* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978 [1976].

Iser, Wolfgang, *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung*, München: Fink, 1994a.

Iser, Wolfgang, *Der implizite Leser: Kommunikationsformen des Romans von Bunyan bis Beckett*, München: Fink, 1994b [1972].

Ishiguro, Kazuo, *The Remains of the Day*, London: Faber and Faber, 1989.

Ishiguro, Kazuo, *When We Were Orphans*, London: Faber and Faber, 2000.

Isles, Duncan, "Johnson and Charlotte Lennox", in: *The New Rambler*, 2/1967, pp. 41–42.

Isles, Duncan, "Appendix", in: Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote or The Adventures of Arabella*, edited by Margaret Dalziel, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989 [1752], pp. 419–428.

Jahn, Manfred, "Narrative Situations", in: David Herman/Manfred Jahn/Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 364–366.

James, Caryn, "They May Not Mean to, but They Do", in: *The New York Times*, August 10, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/10/books/review/James-t.html? pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed March 26, 2014).

James, Henry, *What Maisie Knew*, edited by Douglas Jefferson, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966 [1897].

Jenkins, Henry, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York, NY: New York UP, 2006.

Johnson, Claudia L., "'Let Me Make the Novels of a Country': Barbauld's *The British Novelists* (1810/1820)", in: *Novel*, 34.2/2001, pp. 163–179.

Johnson, Claudia L./Clara Tuite (eds.), *A Companion to Jane Austen,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009a.

Johnson, Claudia L./Clara Tuite, "Introduction", in: Claudia L. Johnson/Clara Tuite (eds.), *A Companion to Jane Austen,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009b, pp. 1–10.

Johnson, Samuel, "Gray", in: *The Lives of the English Poets*, Vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1912 [1781], pp. 474–485.

Johnson, Samuel, *The Rambler*, Vol. 1, edited by W. J. Bate/Albrecht B. Strauss, New Haven, CN: Yale UP, 1969.

Jordan, John O./Robert L. Patten (eds.), *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

Kakutani, Michiko, "Has Her Majesty Read Any Good Books Lately?", in: *The New York Times*, October 30, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/30/ books/30kaku.html?_r=0 (accessed February 26, 2014).

Keen, Suzanne, *Empathy and the Novel*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.

Kelleter, Frank, "Serien als Stresstest", in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 3, 2012.

Keymer, Thomas, "Sentimental Fiction: Ethics, Social Critique and Philanthropy", in: John Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005, pp. 572–601.

Kilb, Andreas, *Kinoblicke: Ausgewählte Filmkritiken,* Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2008.

Kim, James, "Mourning, Melancholia, and Modernity: Sentimental Irony and Downward Mobility in *David Simple*", in: *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 22.3/2010, pp. 477–502.

Klancher, Jon P., "From 'Crowd' to 'Audience': The Making of an English Mass Readership in the Nineteenth Century", in: *ELH,* 50.1/1983, pp. 155–173.

Knox-Shaw, Peter, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment,* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.

Koutsantoni, Katerina, "Issues of Authority and Authoritarianism", in *The Common Reader: Second Series*", in: *Virginia Woolf Bulletin of the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain,* 17/2004, pp. 35–43.

Koutsantoni, Katerina, *Virginia Woolf's* Common Reader, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009.

Kukkonen, Karin, "Quixotic Reasoning: Counterfactuals, Causation and Literary Storyworlds", in: *Paragraph* 37.1/2014, pp. 47–61.

Kvande, Marta, "Reading Female Readers: *The Female Quixote* and *Female Quixotism*", in: Susan Carlile (ed.), *Masters of the Marketplace: British Women Novelists of the 1750s,* Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh UP, 2011, pp. 219–241.

LaCapra, Dominick, "From Trial to Text", in: Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, edited by Margaret Cohen, translated by Eleanor Marx Aveling/Paul de Man, New York, NY: Norton Critical Edition, 2005 [1856/1857], pp. 470–479. Originally published in: Dominick LaCapra, *Madame Bovary on Trial*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1982.

Lakoff, George/Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Lane, Anthony, "Battle Royal", in: *The New Yorker,* 82.32/2006, pp. 91–93.

Langbauer, Laurie, *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990.

Lanser, Susan Sniader, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992.

Laqueur, Thomas W., *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation,* New York, NY: Zone, 2004.

Latham, Sean, *'Am I a Snob?': Modernism and the Novel*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003.

Lawrence, D. H., *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, edited by Michael Squires, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994 [1928].

Lee, Hermione, "Virginia Woolf's Essays", in: Sue Roe/Susan Sellers (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000, pp. 91–108.

Leith, Sam, "Waking up Late at the Palace: *The Uncommon Reader* by Alan Bennett", in: *The Spectator*, August 29, 2007, http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/117881/ waking-up-late-at-the-palace/ (accessed December 8, 2014).

Lennox, Charlotte, *The Female Quixote or The Adventures of Arabella*, edited by Margaret Dalziel, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989 [1752].

Lessing, Doris, *Alfred and Emily*, London: Harper, 2008.

Levine, George, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from* Frankenstein *to* Lady Chatterley, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Lewis, Matthew Gregory, *The Monk*, edited by Howard Anderson, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973 [1796].

Littau, Karin, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania*, Cambridge: Polity, 2006.

Lively, Penelope, *The Photograph*, London: Viking, 2003.

Lodge, David, "Consciousness and the Novel", in: David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002, pp. 1–92.

London Review of Books, http://www.lrb.co.uk/ (accessed December 6, 2014).

Lupton, Christina, "Giving Power to the Medium: Recovering the 1750s", in: *The Eighteenth Century* 52.3–4/2011, pp. 289–302.

Lynch, James J., "Romance and Realism in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*", in: *Essays in Literature* 14.1/1987, pp. 51–63.

Machor, James L./Philip Goldstein (eds.), *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2001.

Machor, James L./Philip Goldstein (eds.), *New Directions in American Reception Study*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.

Mandal, Anthony, "Introduction", in: Anthony Mandal/Brian C. Southam (eds.), *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe,* London: Continuum, 2007a, pp. 1–11.

Mandal, Anthony, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author,* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007b.

Mandal, Anthony/Brian C. Southam (eds.), *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe*, London: Continuum, 2007.

Manguel, Alberto, *A History of Reading,* London: Penguin, 1996.

Manguel, Alberto, *The Traveler, the Tower, and the Worm: The Reader as Metaphor,* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

Mann, Thomas, *Doktor Faustus*, edited by Heinrich Detering, Frankfurt: Fischer, 2007 [1947].

Marcus, Laura, "Ian McEwan's Modernist Time: *Atonement* and *Saturday*", in: Sebastian Groes (ed.), *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, London: Continuum, 2009, pp. 83–114.

Martin, Brett, *Difficult Men: From* The Sopranos *and* The Wire *to* Mad Men *and* Breaking Bad. *Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution*, New York, NY: Faber and Faber, 2013.

Marx, Friedhelm, *Erlesene Helden: Don Sylvio, Werther, Wilhelm Meister und die Literatur*, Heidelberg: Winter, 1995.

Mays, Kelly J., "The Disease of Reading and Victorian Periodicals," in: John O. Jordan/Robert L. Patten (eds.), *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995, pp. 165–194.

McEwan, Ian, *Atonement*, London: Vintage, 2001.

McKechnie, Kara, "Mrs Brown's Mourning and Mr King's Madness: Royal Crisis on Screen", in: Deborah Cartmell/I. Q. Hunter/Imelda Whelehan (eds.), *Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Film and Fiction*, London: Pluto, 2001, pp. 102–119.

McKechnie, Kara, *Alan Bennett*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007.

McKeon, Michael, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002 [1987].

McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York: Routledge, 1964.

Michie, Allen, *Richardson & Fielding: The Dynamics of a Critical Rivalry*, Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1999.

Michie, Allen, "Far from Simple: Sarah Fielding's *Familiar Letters* and the Limits of the Eighteenth-Century Sequel", in: Debra Taylor Bordeau/Elizabeth Kraft (eds.), *On Second Thought: Updating the Eighteenth-Century Text*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007, pp. 83–111.

Michie, Helena, *Victorian Honeymoons: Journeys to the Conjugal,* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Miles, Robert, *Gothic Writing, 1750–1820: A Genealogy*, London: Routledge, 1993.

Mittell, Jason, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, pre-publication edition, MediaCommons Press, 2012–2013, http://mcpress.media-commons.org/complex-television/ (accessed February 26, 2013).

Mölk, Ulrich, "Gustave Flaubert: *Madame Bovary. Moeurs de province*", in: Theodor Wolpers (ed.), *Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur: Studien zu Erscheinungsformen und Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1986, pp. 217–230.

More, Hannah, *The History of Mr. Fantom, (The New Fashioned Philosopher,) and His Man William*, London: Marshall, 1801.

More, Hannah, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, edited by Patricia Demers, Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2007 [1809].

Morini, Massimiliano, *Jane Austen's Narrative Techniques: A Stylistic and Pragmatic Analysis*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.

Morris, Pam, *Realism*, London: Routledge, 2003.

Morrison, Blake, "The Righting of Lives", in: *The Guardian*, May 17, 2008, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/may/17/fiction.dorislessing (accessed February 26, 2014).

Mrs Brown, directed by John Madden, BBC Scotland, 1997.

Müller, Wolfgang G., "Charlotte Lennox' *The Female Quixote* und die Geschichte des englischen Romans", in: *Poetica*, 11/1979, pp. 369–393.

Müller, Wolfgang G., "Don Quichote-Figuren als unzeitgemäße Helden in der englischen Literatur", in: Gerhard R. Kaiser (ed.), *Der unzeitgemäße Held in der Weltliteratur,* Heidelberg: Winter, 1998, pp. 97–113.

Müller, Wolfgang G., "Moralische Implikationen erzähltechnischer Innovationen im Werk von Jane Austen", in: Jutta Zimmermann/Britta Salheiser (eds.), *Ethik und Moral als Problem der Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft,* Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2006, pp. 117–132.

Müller, Wolfgang G., "Imitation und Innovation in der *Don Quijote*-Rezeption im englischen Roman des 18. Jahrhunderts: Drei Fallstudien", in: Klaus-Dieter Ertler/Andrea Maria Humpl (eds.), *Der widerspenstige Klassiker: Don Quijote im 18. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt et al.: Lang, 2007, 55–78.

Müller, Wolfgang G., "An Ethical Narratology", in: Astrid Erll/Herbert Grabes/Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Ethics in Culture: The Dissemination of Values through Literature and Other Media*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008, pp. 117–130.

Müller, Wolfgang G., "Der lesende Quijote in Buchillustrationen: Vier Beispiele", in: Wolfgang G. Müller/Ines Detmers (eds.), *Don Quijotes intermediale Nachleben*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2010, pp. 191–204.

Müller, Wolfgang G., "Literary Figures into Pictorial Image: Illustrations of Don Quixote Reading Romances", in: Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch 55/2014, 239–269.

Müller-Wood, Anja, "Enabling Resistance: Teaching *Atonement* in Germany", in: Steven Barfield/Anja Müller-Wood/Philip Tew/Leigh Wilson (eds.), *Teaching Contemporary British Fiction,* Anglistik & Englischunterricht, Vol. 69, Heidelberg: Winter, 2007, pp. 143–158.

Nelles, Jürgen, *Bücher über Bücher: Das Medium Buch in Romanen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002.

Nelles, William, "Mise en abyme", in: David Herman/Manfred Jahn/Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 312–313.

Nemesvari, Richard, "'Going in a Little for the Subjective': Textual and Moral Performance in *The Doctor's Wife*", in: Pamela K. Gilbert (ed.), *A Companion to Sensation Fiction,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 147–159.

Nerdin, Stacey, "Book Review: *The Uncommon Reader*, by Alan Bennett", *The Scenic Life: Finding Lovely in the Everyday* (blog), accessed Aug 5th, 2013.

Neumann, Fritz-Wilhelm, "'The Artifice of Fiction Can Be Taken for Granted': Pragmatische Epistemologie und Moral in Ian McEwans historischem Roman *Atonement*", in: *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch,* 46/2005, pp. 331–346.

Newey, Katherine, "'What Think You of Books?' Reading in *Pride and Prejudice*", in: *Sidney Studies in English*, 21/1995, pp. 81–94.

Nicklas, Pascal (ed.), *Ian McEwan: Art and Politics*, Anglistik & Englischunterricht, Vol. 73, Heidelberg: Winter, 2009.

Nixon, Cheryl L., "'Stop a Moment at this Preface': The Gendered Paratexts of Fielding, Barker, and Heywood", in: *Journal of Narrative Theory,* 32.2/2002, pp. 123–153.

Nünning, Ansgar, "Die Funktionen von Erzählinstanzen: Analysekategorien und Modelle zur Beschreibung des Erzählerverhaltens", in: *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht,* 30/1997, pp. 323–349.

Nünning, Ansgar, "Fremdverstehen durch literarische Texte: von der Theorie zur Praxis", in: *Der fremdsprachliche Unterricht Englisch*, 35.53/2001a, pp. 4–9.

Nünning, Ansgar, "Metanarration als Lakune der Erzähltheorie: Definition, Typologie und Grundriß einer Funktionsgeschichte metanarrativer Erzähleräußerungen", in: *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik,* 26/2001b, pp. 125–164.

Nünning, Ansgar, "Mimesis des Erzählens: Prolegomena zu einer Wirkungsästhetik, Typologie und Funktionsgeschichte des Akts des Erzählens und der Metanarration", in: Jörg Helbig (ed.), *Erzählen und Erzähltheorie im 20. Jahrhundert: Festschrift für Wilhelm Füger,* Heidelberg: Winter, 2001c, pp. 13–47.

Nünning, Ansgar, "Commentary", in: David Herman/Manfred Jahn/Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* London: Routledge, 2005, p. 74.

Nünning, Vera, "Voicing Criticism in Eighteenth-Century Novels by Women: Narrative Attempts at Claiming Authority", in: Wolfgang Viereck (ed.), *English Past and Present: Selected Papers from the IAUPE Malta Conference in 2010*, Frankfurt: Lang, 2012, pp. 81–107.

Nussbaum, Martha C., *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature,* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.

Nussbaum, Martha C., *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, Boston, MA: Beacon, 1995.

O'Donnell, Patrick, "Metafiction", in: David Herman/Manfred Jahn/Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 301–302.

O'Mealy, Joseph H., *Alan Bennett: A Critical Introduction*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2001.

Odden, Karen M., "'Reading Coolly' in *John Marchmont's Legacy*: Reconsidering M. E. Braddon's Legacy", in: *Studies in the Novel,* 36.1/2004, pp. 21–40.

Oliphant, Margaret, "Novels", in: *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 102.623/1867, pp. 257–280.

Opie, Amelia, *Adeline Mowbray*, edited by Shelley King/John B. Pierce, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999 [1804].

Orr, Mary, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts,* Oxford: Polity, 2003.

Parr, James, *Don Quixote: An Anatomy of Subversive Discourse*, Newark, DE: Cuesta, 1988.

Pascal, Roy, *The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and Its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century European Novel*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977.

Paulson, Ronald, *Don Quixote in England: The Aesthetics of Laughter*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998.

Pawl, Amy, "Feminine Transformations of the *Quixote* in Eighteenth-Century England: Lennox's *Female Quixote* and Her Sisters", in: J.A.G. Ardila (ed.), *The Cervantean Heritage: Reception*

and Influence of Cervantes in Britain, London: Modern Humanities Association 2009, pp. 166–175.

Pawlowicz, Peter H., "Reading Women: Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century England", in: Ann Bermingham/John Brewer (eds.), *The Consumption of Culture, 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 42–53.

Pearson, Jacqueline, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

Perrotta, Tom, *Little Children*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004.

Pessl, Marisha, *Special Topics in Calamity Physics*, London: Penguin, 2007.

Phelan, James/Peter J. Rabinowitz (eds.), *Understanding Narrative*, Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1994.

Phelan, James, "Narrative Judgments and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative: Ian McEwan's *Atonement*", in: James Phelan/Peter J. Rabinowitz (eds.), *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005a, pp. 322–336.

Phelan, James, "Rhetorical Approaches to Narrative", in: David Herman/Manfred Jahn/Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* London: Routledge, 2005b, pp. 500–504.

Pikoulis, John, "Reading and Writing in *Persuasion*", in: *Modern Language Review,* 100.1/2005, pp. 20–36.

Pinard, Ernest, "The Ministry of Justice Against Gustave Flaubert: Brief by the Imperial Counsel", translated by Bregtje Hartendorf-Wallach, in: Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, edited by Margaret Cohen, translated by Eleanor Marx Aveling/Paul de Man, New York, NY: Norton Critical Edition, 2005 [1856/1857], pp. 314–335.

Poe, Edgar Allan, "The Tell-Tale Heart", in Stuart Levine/Susan Levine (eds.), *The Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976, pp. 259–262.

Powers, Richard, *Galatea 2.2*, New York: Picador, 1995.

Prince, Gerald, "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee", in: Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980a, pp. 7–25.

Prince, Gerald, "Notes on the Text as a Reader", in: Susan R. Suleiman/Inge Crosman (eds.), *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980b, pp. 225–240.

Prince, Gerald, "Point of View (Literary)", in: David Herman/Manfred Jahn/Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory,* London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 442–443.

Prince, Gerald, "Reader", in: Peter Hühn/John Pier/Wolf Schmid/Jörg Schönert (eds.), *Handbook of Narratology*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009, pp. 398–410.

Proust, Marcel, *In Search of Lost Time*, translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff, New York: Everyman's Library, 2001 [1927].

Pykett, Lyn, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*, London: Routledge, 1992.

Pykett, Lyn, *The Sensation Novel: From* The Woman in White *to* The Moonstone*,* Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994.

Pykett, Lyn, "Introduction", in: Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife*, edited by Lyn Pykett, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998 [1864], pp. vii–xxv.

Pykett, Lyn, "Mary Elizabeth Braddon", in: Pamela K. Gilbert (ed.), *A Companion to Sensation Fiction,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 123–133.

The Queen, directed by Stephen Frears, Miramax, 2006.

Rabinowitz, Peter J., *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation,* Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1987.

Radcliffe, Ann, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, edited by Bonamy Dobrée, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998 [1794].

Radway, Janice A., *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991 [1984].

Radway, Janice A., "Reading Is Not Eating: Mass-Produced Literature and the Theoretical, Methodological, and Political Consequences of a Metaphor", in: *Book Research Quarterly,* 2.3/1986, pp. 7–29.

Raven, James, "The Book Trades", in: Isabel Rivers (ed.), *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays,* London: Leicester UP, 2001, pp. 1–34.

Raven, James, "Publishing and Bookselling 1660–1780", in: John Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature 1660–1780*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005, pp. 13–36.

Raven, James/Helen Small/Naomi Tadmor (eds.), *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

Reckwitz, Andreas, *Das hybride Subjekt: Eine Theorie der Subjektkulturen von der bürgerlichen Moderne zur Postmoderne*, Göttingen: Velbrück, 2006.

Reeve, Clara, *The Progress of Romance*, Dublin: Price et al., 1785.

Reid, Rebecca, "*The Uncommon Reader* by Alan Bennett", in: *Rebecca Reads: Classics, Nonfiction, Children's Literature* (blog), Oct 28, 2008, http://reviews.rebeccareid.com/the-uncommon-reader-by-alan-bennett (accessed August 5, 2013).

Rennhak, Katharina, "Metaisierung und Ethik: Der postmoderne Roman als *grand récit*?", in: Janine Hauthal et al. (eds.), *Metaisierung in Literatur und anderen Medien: Theoretische Grundlagen – Historische Perspektiven – Metagattungen – Funktionen*, Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2007, pp. 206–226.

Richardson, Alan, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Richardson, Alan, "Reading Practices", in: Janet Todd (ed.), *Jane Austen in Context,* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005, pp. 397–405.

Richardson, Brian, "The Other Reader's Response: On Multiple, Divided, and Oppositional Audiences", in: *Criticism,* 39.1/1997, pp. 31–53.

Richardson, Brian, "Introduction. The Implied Author: Back from the Grave or Simply Dead Again?", in: *Style,* 45.1/2011, pp. 1–10.

Richardson, Samuel, *Pamela*, edited by Albert Rivero, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011 [1740].

Richardson, Samuel, *Clarissa*, edited by Angus Ross, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985 [1748].

Richardson, Samuel, *Sir Charles Grandison*, edited by Jocelyn Harris, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972 [1753].

Richetti, John (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996a.

Richetti, John, "Introduction", in: John Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996b, pp. 1–8.

Richetti, John, *The English Novel in History 1700–1780*, London: Routledge, 1999.

Richetti, John (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature 1660–1780*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.

Rivers, Isabel (ed.), *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays,* London: Leicester UP, 2001.

Robinson, Richard, "The Modernism of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*", in: *Modern Fiction Studies,* 56.3/2010, pp. 473–495.

Ross, Deborah, "Mirror, Mirror: The Didactic Dilemma of *The Female Quixote*", in: *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 27.3/1987, pp. 455–473.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Emile*, translated by Allan Bloom, New York: Basic Books, 1979 [1762].

Rowson, Susannah, *Charlotte Temple*, edited by Marion L. Rust, New York, NY: Norton Critical Edition, 2011 [1794].

Rushdie, Salman, *Midnight's Children*, London: Cape, 1981.

Ruskin, John, "Fiction, Fair and Foul", in: E. T. Cooke/Alexander Wedderburn (eds.), *The Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. 34, London: Allen, 1908 [1880], pp. 265–397.

Ryan, Marie-Laure, "Will New Media Produce New Narratives?", in: Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.), *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004, pp. 337–359.

Ryle, Gilbert, "Jane Austen and the Moralists", in: Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 1, London: Hutchinson, 1971, pp. 286–301.

Schenda, Rudolf, *Volk ohne Buch: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der populären Lesestoffe 1770–1910*, Munich: dtv, 1977 [1970].

Schmid, Wolf, "Textadressat", in: Thomas Anz (ed.), *Handbuch Literaturwissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013, pp. 171–181.

Schmid, Wolf, *Narratology: An Introduction*, translated by Alexander Starritt, Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2010 [2003].

Schwalm, Helga, "Figures of Authorship, Empathy, & the Ethics of Narrative (Mis-)Recognition in Ian McEwan's Later Fiction", in: Pascal Nicklas (ed.), *Ian McEwan: Art and Politics*, Anglistik & Englischunterricht, Vol. 73, Heidelberg: Winter, 2009, pp. 173–185.

Scudéry, Madeleine de, *Artamène ou le grand Cyrus*, Paris: Courbé, 1654.

Scudéry, Madeleine de, *Clélie*, Paris: Courbé, 1660.

Sénard, Marie-Antoine-Jules, "Speech for the Defense: By the Counsel for the Defense", translated by Bregtje Hartendorf-Wallach, in: Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, edited by Margaret Cohen, translated by Eleanor Marx Aveling/Paul de Man, New York, NY: Norton Critical Edition, 2005 [1856/1857], pp. 335–385.

Shattock, Joanne, "The Professionalisation of Authorship in the Mid-Nineteenth Century", in: Ingo Berensmeyer/Gert Buelens/Marysa Demoor (eds.), "Authorship as Cultural Performance", special issue, *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 60.1/2012, pp. 65–76.

Shaw, Harry E., "Austen's Realist Play", in: Claudia L. Johnson/Clara Tuite (eds.), *A Companion to Jane Austen,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 206–215.

Siskin, Clifford, "More Is Different: Literary Change in the Mid and Late Eighteenth Century", in: John Richetti (ed.), *The Cambridge History of English Literature 1660–1780*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005, pp. 797–823.

Small, Miriam Rossiter, *Charlotte Ramsay Lennox: An Eighteenth Century Lady of Letters*, Hamden: Archon, 1969 [1935].

Smiles, Samuel, *Character*, London: Murray, 1878 [1871].

Smiles, Samuel, *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance*, London: Murray, 1897 [1859].

Smith Palo, Sharon, "The Good Effects of a Whimsical Study: Romance and Women's Learning in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*", in: *Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* 18.2/2006, pp. 203–228.

Smollett, Tobias, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, edited by Paul-Gabriel Boucé, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979 [1748].

Spencer, Jane, "Narrative Technique: Austen and Her Contemporaries", in: Claudia L. Johnson/ Clara Tuite (eds.), *A Companion to Jane Austen,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 185–194.

Spitzer, Manfred, *Digitale Demenz: Wie wir unsere Kinder um den Verstand bringen*, Munich: Droemer, 2012.

Städtke, Klaus/Ralph Kray (eds.), *Spielräume des auktorialen Diskurses,* Berlin: Akademie, 2003.

Stang, Richard, *The Theory of the Novel in England: 1850 – 1870,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959.

Stanzel, Franz. K., *A Theory of Narrative,* translated by Charlotte Goedsche, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984 [1982, 1979].

Sternberg, Meir, "Omniscience in Narrative Construction: Old Challenges and New", in: *Poetics Today,* 28.4/2007, pp. 683–794.

Stewart, Garrett, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.

Stewart, Garrett, *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text,* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Stone, Misha, "*The Uncommon Reader*", in: *Book Group Buzz: A Booklist Blog* (blog), June 6, 2009, http://bookgroupbuzz.booklistonline.com/2009/06/06/th-uncommon-reader/ (accessed August 5, 2014).

Strasen, Sven, *Rezeptionstheorien: Literatur-, sprach- und kulturwissenschaftliche Ansätze und kulturelle Modelle*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008.

Suleiman, Susan R./Inge Crosman (eds.), *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980.

Swift, Graham, *Waterland*, London: Heinemann, 1983.

Taylor, John Tinnon, *Early Opposition to the English Novel: The Popular Reaction from 1760 to 1830*, New York: King's Crown, 1943.

Thackeray, William Makepeace, *Vanity Fair*, edited by Peter Shillingsburg, New York: Norton, 1994 [1848].

Thackeray, William Makepeace, *The History of Pendennis*, edited by Peter Shillingsburg, New York: Garland, 1991 [1850].

Thackeray, William Makepeace, *The History of Henry Esmond*, edited by Peter Shillingsburg, New York: Garland, 1989 [1852].

Thackeray, William Makepeace, *The Virginians*, edited by George Saintsbury, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1908 [1859].

Tiger, Virginia, "Life Story: Doris, Alfred and Emily", in: *Doris Lessing Studies*, 28.1/2009, pp. 22–24.

Todd, Janet (ed.), *Jane Austen in Context,* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.

Tompkins, Jane P., *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790–1860*, New York: Oxford UP, 1986.

Tompkins, Jane P. (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism,* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980a.

Tompkins, Jane P., "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response", in: Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism,* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980b, pp. 201–232.

Tönnies, Merle, "A New Self-Conscious Turn at the Turn of the Century? Postmodernist Metafiction in Recent Works by 'Established' British Writers", in: Christopher Ribbat (ed.), *Twenty-First Century Fiction: Readings, Essays, Conversations*, Anglistik & Englischunterricht, Vol. 66, Heidelberg: Winter, 2005, pp. 57–82.

Trollope, Anthony, *The Warden*, edited by Owen Chadwick, London: Trollope Society, 1995 [1855].

Trollope, Anthony, *Barchester Towers*, edited by Ruth Rendell, London: Trollope Society, 1995 [1857].

Twain, Mark, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, edited by John Gerber, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980 [1876].

Twain, Mark, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, edited by Peter Coveney, London: Penguin, 2003 [1884/1885].

Uddén, Anna, "Narratives and Counter-Narratives – Quixotic Hermeneutics in Eighteenth-Century England: Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*", in: *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas,* 6.2/2008, pp. 443–457.

Vermeule, Blakey, "God Novels", in: Alan Richardson/Ellen Spolsky (eds.), *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture, and Complexity*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, 147–165.

Volk-Birke, Sabine, "Romance, Madness, and Woman's History: Charlotte Lennox' *The Female Quixote* Revisited", in: Wolf Kindermann/Gisela Herman-Brennecke (eds.), *Echoes in a Mirror: The English Institute after 125 Years*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2001, 63–84.

Waldron, Mary, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time,* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

Walsh, Richard, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction*, Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2007.

Warhol, Robyn R., *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel,* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1989.

Warhol, Robyn R., *Having a Good Cry: Effeminate Feelings and Pop-Culture Forms,* Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2003.

Warner, William Beatty, *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684–1750,* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998.

Watt, Ian, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1965 [1957].

Waugh, Patricia, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction,* London: Methuen, 1984.

Weldon, John/Jo Case/Malcolm Neil, "Bookshops, Ebooks and the Future of the Novel", in: *Overland*, 207/2012, http://overland.org.au/previous-issues/issue-207/feature-jo-case-john-weldon-malcolm-neil/ (accessed November 14, 2014).

Whately, Richard, "Unsigned Review: *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*", in: Ian Littlewood (ed.), *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, Vol. 1, Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998, pp. 318–334. Originally published in: *Quarterly Review*, 24.48/1821, pp. 352–376.

Wieland, Christoph Martin, *Die Abentheuer des Don Sylvio von Rosalva*, Leipzig: Weidmann & Reich, 1772 [1764].

Wilde, Oscar, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, edited by Joseph Bristow, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.

Willand, Marcus, *Lesermodelle und Lesertheorien: Historische und systematische Perspektiven*, Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2014.

Williams, Ioan (ed.), *Novel and Romance 1700–1800: A Documentary Record*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.

Wolf, Werner, "Schauerroman und Empfindsamkeit: Zur Beziehung zwischen Gothic novel und empfindsamem Roman in England", in: *Anglia* 107/1989, pp. 1–33.

Wolf, Werner, *Ästhetische Illusion und Illusionsdurchbrechung in der Erzählkunst: Theorie und Geschichte mit Schwerpunkt auf englischem illusionsstörenden Erzählen,* Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993.

Wolf, Werner, "Formen literarischer Selbstbezüglichkeit in der Erzählkunst: Versuch einer Typologie und ein Exkurs zu '*mise en cadre*' und '*mise en reflet/série*'", in: Jörg Helbig (ed.), *Erzählen und Erzähltheorie im 20. Jahrhundert: Festschrift für Wilhelm Füger,* Heidelberg: Winter, 2001a, pp. 49–84.

Wolf, Werner, "Ian McEwan's *Atonement* als Synthese aktueller Trends im englischen Erzählen der Gegenwart", in: *Sprachkunst: Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft,* 32.2/2001b, pp. 291–311.

Wolff, Erwin, "Der intendierte Leser: Überlegungen und Beispiele zur Einführung eines literaturwissenschaftlichen Begriffs", in: *Poetica,* 4/1971, pp. 141–166.

Wolff, Robert Lee, "Devoted Disciple: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1862–1873", in: *Harvard Library Bulletin,* 22/1974, pp. 5–161.

Wolff, Robert Lee, *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon,* New York, NY: Garland, 1979.

Wolfson, Susan J., "Re: Reading *Pride and Prejudice*: 'What think you of books?'", in: Claudia L. Johnson/Clara Tuite (eds.), *A Companion to Jane Austen,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 112–122.

Wollstonecraft, Mary, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, edited by Deirdre Shauna Lynch, New York, NY: Norton Critical Edition, 2009 [1792].

Wolpers, Theodor (ed.), *Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur: Studien zu Erscheinungsformen und Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1986a.

Wolpers, Theodor, "Zu Begriff und Geschichte des Motivs 'Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur': Gemeinsames Vorwort der Beiträger", in: Theodor Wolpers (ed.), *Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur: Studien zu Erscheinungsformen und Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1986b, pp. 7–29.

Wolpers, Theodor, "Der weibliche Quijote in England: Charlotte Lennox' *The Female Quixote* und die literarische Tradition", in: Theodor Wolpers (ed.), *Gelebte Literatur in der Literatur: Studien zu Erscheinungsformen und Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1986c, pp. 134–162.

Wood, Sarah, *Quixotic Fictions of the USA, 1792–1815*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

Woolf, Virginia, "The Common Reader", in: Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader: First Series*, London: Hogarth, 1957 [1925], pp. 11–12.

Woolf, Virginia, *Mrs Dalloway*, edited by Morris Beja, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996 [1925].

Woolf, Virginia, *To the Lighthouse*, edited by Susan Dick, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992 [1927].

Woolf, Virginia, "How Should One Read a Book?", in: Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, Vol. 2, London: Hogarth, 1966a, pp. 1–11.

Woolf, Virginia, "Middlebrow", in: Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, Vol. 2, London: Hogarth, 1966b, pp. 196–203.

Zafón, Carlos Ruiz, *The Shadow of the Wind*, translated by Lucia Graves, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004.

Zerweck, Bruno, *Die Synthese aus Realismus und Experiment: Der englische Roman der 1980er und 1990er Jahre aus erzähltheoretischer und kulturwissenschaftlicher Sicht*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001.

Zieger, Susan, "Opium, Alcohol, and Tobacco: The Substance of Memory in *The Moonstone*", in: Pamela K. Gilbert (ed.), *A Companion to Sensation Fiction,* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 208–219.

Zunshine, Lisa, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*, Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 2006.

Zusak, Markus, *The Book Thief*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

Index of Names