

Sympathy and its Vicissitudes

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As recent scholarship has affirmed, the most salient characteristic of American sentimental writing is not so much excessive feeling but interpersonal experience, the showcasing of “the self-in-relation.”¹ Nineteenth-century sentimental novels highlight affective connections. They expose the crucial role that emotional attachments play in the development of the self, and they function as pedagogical tools, teaching their readers how to interact and establish community with others. Of course, these sentimental novels were only one means of representing interrelational experience. Nineteenth-century fiction offered scenes of hypnosis, magnetism, mesmerism, and romantic love as alternative ways for figuring the self in relation to others. What differentiates sentimentalism from these other phenomena is the former’s commitment to the fantasy of similitude. Sentimental writing features interactions among participants who are manifestly diverse but whose differences belie a common humanity and capacity for affect. While mesmerism and hypnosis foreground the coercive nature of their projects (the power of one subject over another), sentimentalism offers up, at least at first glance, a vision of affinity and sameness. For the sentimentalist, all men are created equal not because they are endowed with certain inalienable rights, but because all have the same ability to grieve and to love intensely. Moreover, through the device of sympathy, each subject has the capacity to enter into the sentiments of another, to feel the pain or pleasure of his neighbor and thus to achieve a degree of shared affective experience. Sentimentalism, then, imagines a democratic world based in the communitarian values of common feeling, collective action, and public responsibility.

And yet, even as sentimental literature stresses attunement of feeling and common capacity for affect, it is grounded in a framework of social inequity. Sympathetic connections take place at sites of disparity—at moments that expose the relative gain or (more likely) loss of one person in relation to another. “I love you,” Little Eva tells the slave girl Topsy in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) “because you haven’t had any father, or mother, or friends;—because you’ve been a poor abused child.”² It is precisely Topsy’s deprivation (her poverty, her suffering, her want of familial connections) that makes possible an emotional correspondence between the two girls. Their affective attunement, in other words, is contingent on the asymmetry of their lived conditions. Sentimentalism, then, can imagine alignment of hearts only when it imagines disparity in circumstance. Social or external inequities are the conditions for internal correspondence of feeling, and thus in this fiction, collectivity is achieved only in the context of abuse. This is what I call the paradox of sentimentalism.

That antebellum writers would avail themselves of a discourse that simultaneously affirms emotional affinity and social disparity is perhaps not surprising. After all, the Northeastern American middle class that both produced and consumed sentimental fiction was itself intensely conflicted. Emerging out of urban-industrial growth and the implementation of a wage-labor system, this class of merchants, manufacturers, bankers, professional clerks, and shopkeepers was committed to an ethic of acquisition and upkeep. Fully conscious of the liminality of their positions (fortunes rose and fell in these years with dramatic unpredictability), members of this American bourgeoisie were zealously protective of their newly acquired status, policing their neighborhoods, churches and parlors for signs of encroachment by working-class and non-white subjects.³ At the same time that this growing white middle class contributed to an increasingly hierarchized society, however, portions of it were also outraged by the unequal treatment of slaves, free blacks, Indians, immigrants, and (to a lesser extent) women. Having achieved its status in large part through Jacksonian progress and entrepreneurial initiative, this emerging middle class was eager to protect the procedures of democratic mobility. Those agitating on behalf of the dispossessed borrowed the rhetoric of the revolutionary and republican period, insisting that America would fulfill its democratic ideals only when it granted full representation and equality before the law to its disfranchised populations.

The antebellum urban middle class was thus characterized by two essentially different ideological agendas: a largely socio-economic program oriented towards authority and distinction and a largely political program geared towards parity and union.⁴ Given this internal rift, the production and popularity of sentimentalism during the antebellum years appears entirely logical. In a period characterized by conflicting tendencies towards differentiation and unity—when an emerging white middle class struggled to distinguish itself and protect its privileged status at the same moment that abolitionists and reformers mobilized increasingly radical egalitarian rhetoric—the development of an ideological

practice that could negotiate between social hierarchy and democratic idealism proved crucial. Sentimentalism provided such a practice. Insofar as it imagined interior similitude in the context of external or social disparity, it allowed middle-class readers to imagine self-other relations simultaneously in terms of commonality and distinction. It was thus a useful discourse with which to mediate between conflicting impulses towards political egalitarianism on the one hand and socio-economic hierarchy on the other.

In this way, we might understand sentimentalism as what Raymond Williams has called a “dominant practice”—an expression of the interests of a ruling class, that appears natural and justified (despite its subordinating effects) and is thus able to elicit consent.⁵ According to this logic, sentimentalism was a way for the American bourgeoisie to consolidate and obscure its power. By embracing the rhetoric of equality, in other words, sentimentalism worked to assuage social conflict while stabilizing categories of difference. Such an understanding helps to explain the whiff of hypocrisy and disingenuousness in this literature—the way loving exchanges appear haunted by an undercurrent of malevolence. At the same time, however, it would be inaccurate to dismiss sentimentalism as merely a tool of middle-class domination. As Raymond Williams reminds us, hegemonies are always incomplete because “no mode of production and therefore . . . no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention.”⁶ Sentimentalism was not a totalizing, internally rigorous system but rather a fluid and contested method for presenting human relationships. That it arose out of a genuine commitment to contradictory ideals meant that sympathetic exchanges in this literature could be fluid and unpredictable—marked by changing dynamics of affinity and struggle.

This understanding of sentimentalism was mockingly elaborated by Herman Melville in his 1857 novel, *The Confidence-Man*. Set aboard a steamer satirically named the *Fidèle*, *The Confidence-Man* follows the machinations of a wily mountebank and highlights the scene of sympathetic exchange as a site where social interactions continually upend themselves. In one particularly fascinating tableau, Melville traces the relations between benefactor and beneficiary as they slowly metamorphose over the course of an encounter. At the start of this scene, a bereaved character referred to as the Weedman appeals to an affluent Merchant for both sympathy and bank notes. When the latter responds with suspicion rather than generosity, the Weedman takes on an air of “mild gravity, not a little disconcerting” Melville states “as there was in it what seemed the aspect not alone of the superior, but, as it were, the rebuker.” As the offended Weedman departs, the wealthy Merchant is left feeling embarrassed and “not wholly without self-reproach.”⁷ In the course of their interaction, then, the beneficiary is transformed from importuner to moralizer, the benefactor from philanthropist to penitent. Melville’s portrait demonstrates the elasticity of sympathetic transactions and thus the inadequacy of understanding sentimentalism in terms of a static model of benevolence and gratitude or domination and submission.

Through its parodying of the sentimental scene of exchange, *The Confidence-Man* makes manifest what much of sentimentalism tacitly acknowledges: that affective connections are fragile and shifting, that they contain areas of undecidability, moments of rupture wherein relations can rearrange and transpose themselves. In this way, many sentimental authors never fully manage the middle-class hegemonizing effects of their novels. Rather, in providing (whether consciously or not) scenes of protean and amorphous relations—scenes which are, moreover, subject to the varied reactions of individual readers—these authors create spaces in which social interactions are never fully determined. Recognizing sentimental novels through this fluid, upending framework is crucial to understanding their resistance to narrow partisan readings. In the last thirty years criticism on sentimental fiction has tended to emphasize either its democratic potential or its coercive power, viewing sentimentalism alternatively as “*the political strategy of the disenfranchised*”⁸ or as an “*imperial project . . . intended as a tool for the control of others.*”⁹ More recently, Lora Romero, Eve Sedgwick, and Cathy Davidson (among others) have called attention to the inadequacy of understanding antebellum sentimental and domestic fiction through binaries of freedom and subjection and subversion and complicity.¹⁰

My reading extends this latter scholarship insofar as it, too, resists reducing the complexity of sentimental literature to a single political platform or unitary design. More specifically, it insists that many sentimental novels contained changing dynamics and unpredictable exchanges, that reflect the conflicted ideological impulses of their authors. In what follows, I examine both the egalitarian and the hierarchizing strains of antebellum sentimental fiction. Through tracing the concept of sympathy, first in Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and then in the fiction of Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and E.D.E.N. Southworth, I argue that while some sentimental writers merely showcased sympathetic relations in an effort to legitimate social hierarchy, for others, the results were less fully determined. This latter group presented sympathetic exchanges as fluid and changing, characterized by alternating patterns of aggressive willfulness and intimate dependence—now culminating in merging, now in repudiation, now in domination, now in love. These variations in relational dynamics bear a striking resemblance to what psychoanalytic thinker Jessica Benjamin (following Habermas) has called intersubjectivity. According to Benjamin, the intersubjective perspective focuses on the space of interaction between individuals and argues for a mutual dynamism in which the self is capable of both “transforming and being transformed by the other.”¹¹ Using Benjamin’s theory of intersubjectivity, I demonstrate that while displays of sympathy were organized around power differentials, these could shift and transform as authors sought to represent characters in dynamic relation to others. The concern of these authors was to present a flexible model of interaction, one able to accommodate fluctuations in feeling and ascendancy and thus to reflect the volatility and unpredictability of antebellum social relations.

Correspondence and Community

Writing in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century, Hannah More was one of the earliest women to investigate the category of sentiment, or what was then more commonly referred to as “sensibility.” She characterized it as “that exquisite sense of feeling which God implanted in the heart as a stimulus to quicken us in relieving the miseries of others.”¹² According to More, displays of sensibility needed to follow two sets of guidelines. First, they had to be “conscientiously governed” (177). Unregulated feeling, she wrote, stood at the root of “some of the blackest crimes which stain the annals of mankind, profligacy, murder, and especially suicide” (177). Second, and just as crucially, passion needed to find its proper direction. It should never be turned inward on the self, she insisted, but rather should “flow out in active charity, and afford assistance, protection, or consolation to every species of distress within its reach” (187). The purpose of sensibility, then, is two-fold for More: “it is bestowed for an exercise to the possessor’s own virtue, and at the same time as a keen instrument with which he may better work for the good of others” (177). In other words, it elicits and reinforces self-control while simultaneously creating benevolence and community.

For the generation of American sentimental writers who succeeded and read Hannah More, her teachings were indispensable.¹³ Primarily middle-class white women, they borrowed More’s understanding of sensibility as both self-regulatory and other-directed. While they stressed the importance of individual discipline, therefore, they tended to reject the solitary, self-reliant subject in favor of an interpersonal or relational orientation. In their novels, characters do not struggle alone but rather achieve self-command and definition *through* the efforts of those around them. The loving friend, the stern older brother, the concerned minister—these are the familiar figures who ensure the proper growth and formation of the protagonist. Accordingly, isolation and lack of fellow-feeling constitute the greatest threats to a self who can only arrive at a reflexive understanding through sustained contact with another. When, in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Senator Bird finally concedes that his wife knows him better than he knows himself (153), he is merely reinforcing the sentimental lesson that relational ties form the best means towards self-actualization.

Sentimentalism’s attention to self-realization, it needs to be stressed, does not mean that it is merely a variant of individualism. While recent deconstructionist accounts have collapsed the difference between sentimentalism and individualism—seeing them as fungible and mutually constituting phenomena¹⁴—it is important to retain the distinction between the two, not least because it was precisely this difference between sentimental notions of community and individualist notions of autonomous self-hood that preoccupied many *non*-sentimental writers of the antebellum period. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, was primarily committed to an understanding of the self in isolation from the influence or understanding of others. “[S]ouls never touch their objects,”

he wrote in “Experience” (1844). “An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with.”¹⁵ Prompted by the death of his son and his own failure, as father, to grieve deeply in response to this loss, Emerson’s essay is a meditation on the finality of individual perception and the impossibility of mutual or shared experience: “Life will be imaged, but cannot be divided nor doubled. . . . The soul is not twin-born, but the only begotten . . . admitting no co-life.”¹⁶

While sentimental writers acknowledged the specificity of individual response, they did not, like Emerson, see this as resulting in disconnection. Indeed, the great irony of sentimentalism is that it understands individual feeling as the basis for shared experience; that is, it relies on the particular in creating a vision of the universal.¹⁷ This movement towards shared experience is principally achieved through the mechanism of sympathy. Comparable to our contemporary understanding of empathy, sympathy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries referred to the ability to experience the feelings of someone else. As Adam Smith explains in his influential *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), in sympathy we use our imagination to “place ourselves in [another’s] situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.”¹⁸ Such place switching, Smith elaborates, can actually ameliorate the pain of sufferers who “disburthen themselves of a part of their distress” the moment they share it with a sympathizing witness (15). According to this fantasy, emotional experiences of joy and affliction need not be restricted to discrete individual subjects but can permeate the perimeters of neighboring bodies creating a mutuality of affect that Smith calls “correspondence.”¹⁹

Such affective sharing points to a particular understanding of psychosomatic experience in the eighteenth century—a perception that individual feeling is fluid and unboundaried, capable of being accessed by multiple others. But it also has crucial political implications. Insofar as sympathy creates an atmosphere of shared experience, it obliterates the distance and distinction between subjects, rendering people (in Smith’s words) “in some measure the same” (9). Moreover, to the extent that sympathetic responsiveness is said to characterize all individuals (according to Smith, even “the greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it” [9]), it is imagined as the common denominator of social life. What conjoins humanity, then, is not merely correspondence of feeling but corresponding *capacity* for feeling. “[Y]ou seem to feel just as I do . . .” a working-class woman remarks to her affluent mistress in Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *A New-England Tale* (1822). “[N]ot that I mean to compare myself to you,” she continues, “but it is the *nature of the feeling*—it is the same in the high and the low, the rich and the poor.”²⁰ There is,

sentimentalism tells us, a minimal affective sameness among subjects, and this is what makes for equality and community.

Problems arise, however, when this minimal affective sameness acquires heft and definition, when its universal quality begins to be associated with its particular and provincial manifestations. Naomi Schor has written about this false quality of universalism and the difficulty it poses for an emancipatory politics:

[W]hat has passed for the universal . . . is in fact nothing but a sham, a fake, a phony, or, in Rosi Braidotti's feminist rendition, 'an inflation of masculinity into cosmic transcendental narcissism.' . . . The false universal passes itself off as a whole (Mankind) standing for all its constitutive parts (Women, Children, Blacks, Queers), rather than recognizing that it is a mere fragment of the whole, which is to say, man. . . . The universal whose cover we have blown is, then, an inflated particular.²¹

Translating Schor's statement into the terms of sentimentalism, we might say that in mobilizing the rhetoric of universalism ("we're all alike inside"), sentimentalism masks its investment in particulars. When sentimental writers affirm (as they often do) that God loves all his children regardless of status or skin color, they obscure that their very designation of God is based on a paradigm of white, middle-class Christian particularity. Thus, to return to Sedgwick, the same author who imagines virtue to be "the same in the high and the low, the rich and the poor" also imagines it as unmistakably white. "Look in the glass," says one character to a virtuous slave who has been accidentally coated in lint from a nearby dustbin, "you'll see how white you'll be in heaven; the black stains will all be washed out there."²² Sedgwick reminds us that while faith in social similitude could participate in visions of political egalitarianism, it could also promote a stifling homogeneity that tended to suppress individual differences.²³ Equally troublesome, this ersatz universality tended to mask the persistence of asymmetrical power relations within the sentimental fantasy. It is thus to the hierarchical structure of sentimentalism that I now turn.

Reason, Distinction, and Exploitation

In the sentimental tradition, sympathy is generated not by merely viewing the distress of another, but by actively entering into that other's circumstances.²⁴ This entry is facilitated by a narrative account of the principal's affliction. According to Smith, the "first question which we ask is, What has befallen you?" and "[t]ill this be answered . . . our fellow-feeling is not very considerable" (11-12). Sympathy, then, is contingent on discourse; we enter into vicarious suffering only by entering into language and storytelling. Indeed, writes Smith, "[g]eneral

lamentations, which express nothing but the anguish of the sufferer, create rather a curiosity to inquire into his situation, along with some disposition to sympathize with him, than any actual sympathy that is very sensible" (11). Only when the interlocutor gains a full sense of the principal's grievances, Smith continues, can fellow-feeling be aroused. Thus, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Eliza's entry into the home of Senator and Mary Bird does not incite immediate sympathy so much as curiosity and confusion. It is only after she relates her tale of horror that the audience gathered around her exhibit various signs of affective distress (150). Similarly, when the Senator brings the battered figure of Eliza to the home of Honest old John Van Trompe, the latter is concerned but emotionally unmoved. Only after the Senator relates "a few words" (160) of Eliza's story in private is honest John transformed, "com[ing] . . . nigh to swearin'" and "wip[ing] his eyes with the back of a great, freckled, yellow hand" (160). Eliza's *story* thus acts as the catalyst for sympathetic response, circulating among characters and readers and producing intense emotion even in the absence of her actual, physical body. Feeling is disseminated in this scenario not merely through vision, witnessing the spectacle of suffering, but through discourse, relaying the narrative circumstances of suffering.²⁵

This emphasis on discourse suggests that the achievement of fellow-feeling relies on cognition and understanding rather than on any automatic or blind responsiveness. Smith affirms this when he writes that "[t]he compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his *present reason and judgment*" (12, emphasis added). "Reason and judgment," then, are necessary for the achievement of sympathetic unity, and yet, as Smith explains, it is precisely these elements that also limit the extent of this compassionate communion. Because the sympathetic onlooker approaches the scene of suffering in a rational state, his vicarious suffering is never simply a true "reflection" of the anguish of the principal. There is, writes Smith, a "secret consciousness that the change of situations, from which the sympathetic situation arises, is but imaginary," and this consciousness "not only lowers [the feeling in] degree, but, in some measure, varies it in kind, and gives it a quite different modification." While the sentiments of principal and spectator can achieve a "concord," then, they can never achieve any true "union" (22). "Reason and judgment" prevent the total collapse of boundaries between self and other. In psychoanalytic terms, they foster "differentiation," preserving difference even at the moment of emotional attunement.²⁶

This cognitive differentiation between participants creates a sense of distance and gives the scene of suffering a theatrical dimension. As David Marshall has commented, because sympathy is often accompanied by spectatorship and takes place at a rational level of remove, it operates on our senses much as a play might: "Sympathy in this sense is always already an aesthetic experience."²⁷

The medium of fiction, of course, serves to separate the sympathizing reader even further from the lives of sufferers, thereby contributing to this aestheticizing effect. Ironically, then, although it is stories that produce the desired sympathetic response, it is also stories that increasingly remove witnesses from actual scenes of affliction. The result, as sentimentalism's detractors like to point out, is often passive spectatorship. Instead of actively struggling against human suffering, in other words, sentimental readers respond only on a mediated, psychic level. At worst, they indulge in the guilty pleasure of *schadenfreude* and at best they merely (to quote Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous injunction) "feel right."²⁸

This morally ambiguous aspect of sympathy can be glimpsed in "Aunt Judy's Story," a short narrative by Matilda G. Thompson published in Lydia Maria Child's *Anti-Slavery Book* (1859). Curling up on her father's lap, the young heroine of the story, Cornelia, pleads, "Dear papa, tell us a story with a poor slave in it, won't you? and I will give you as many kisses as you please." "No, no, papa," counters Cornelia's brother, Alfred, "not about the slave, but the poor Indian, who has been far worse treated than the slave was or ever will be." Brutal stories of each are told in an effort to establish who "was the worst used."²⁹ When Alfred and Cornelia finally agree that the slave was the more pitiful, the two "go to bed and thence to the land of dreams."³⁰ Thompson's story demonstrates how the necessary distance between sufferer and sympathizer mitigates the urgency of social reform and turns sentimental tales of suffering into bedtime fare. Children, moreover, were not the only ones to appropriate stories of misused slaves and Indians for their leisure hours. Thomas Gossett reports that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* inspired a host of household products, including candles, clothes, and figurines. In one parlor game based on the novel, players competed with one another to see who could reunite the most slave families.³¹ These accounts indicate the extent to which the suffering of dispossessed populations could be deployed towards middle-class entertainment and fantasy. This, then, is the danger of sentimental fiction: its scenes of affliction could be mobilized towards individual pleasure, thus reinforcing hierarchy under the guise of establishing community.³²

This sadistic potential of sentimental literature proceeds from a fundamental contradiction in the notion of sympathy. Although it is predicated on shared feeling, sympathy can arise only in response to an initial disparity. It is, in other words, the relative dispossession of the one that creates the conditions of possibility for the emotional attunement of the two.³³ The paradox of sentimental fiction, then, is that it emphasizes the themes of community and benevolence only in the context of hierarchy and suffering; while it focuses on inherent equality and correspondence of feeling, it imagines these as consequences of fundamental asymmetries in the social order. Sentimentalism by this logic, is never simply utopian expression because its fantasy of affective unity relies on the underlying presence of dispossession. Accordingly, affliction and hierarchy are the very mainstays of a healthy society for it is these alone that insure the creation of

fellow-feeling. This conception of American society was perhaps first articulated by John Winthrop in his sermon, “A Modell of Christian Charity,” delivered in 1630 while on board the *Arbella* headed from England to Massachusetts Bay. “God Almighty in his most holy and wise providence hath soe disposed of the Condition of mankinde, as in all times some must be rich some poore, some highe and eminent in power and dignitie; others meane and in subjection.” Among the reasons for the necessity of this inequality, Winthrop lists “[t]hat every man might have need of other, and from hence they might be all knitt more nearly together in the Bond of brotherly affection.” For Winthrop, then, social hierarchy was a divinely ordained method for insuring Christian love and charity.³⁴

Two hundred years later, Catharine Maria Sedgwick drew on Winthrop’s recipe for social unity in a novel she titled *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man*. Beginning with the claim that “those that are well . . . can never value [things] as those who are . . . suffering,”³⁵ Sedgwick’s novel is a curious celebration of the joys of poverty and hard labor. “There is a lively pleasure in this *making do* that the rich know not of,” Sedgwick writes (30). The affluent, on the other hand, know a different kind of pleasure; their existence is made meaningful through the kindness they confer on the less fortunate. Like Winthrop, then, Sedgwick imagines the needy poor and the generous middle class as constituting a perfect circuit of lack and surplus, of requirement and munificence. This mutuality is invoked as a way to obscure the more pernicious effects of class difference. As the novel’s heroine, Susan, comments “when [your neighbors] are kind, it don’t seem to me to make much difference whether you are rich or poor.” Here is how Sedgwick’s narrator responds to this statement:

Susan’s simple remark had an important bearing on that great subject of inequality of condition, which puzzles the philosopher, and sometimes disturbs the Christian. But did not our happy little friend suggest a solution to the riddle? Has not Providence made this inequality the necessary result of the human condition, and is not the true agrarian principle to be found in the voluntary exercise of those virtues that produce an interchange of benevolent offices? *If there were a perfect community of goods, where would be the opportunity for the exercise of the virtues of justice and mercy, humility, fidelity, and gratitude?* (39, emphasis added)

Inequity, according to Sedgwick’s narrator, is crucial to society for it provides the conditions of possibility for benevolent interaction. Without hierarchy, she implies—reiterating the terms of what I have called the sentimental paradox—there would be no occasion for the creation of community.

Sedgwick reinforces this notion by emphasizing the ways social disparity gives rise to intense emotional attunement. Her novel centers on the members

of a hard working family, the Aikins, who, while not rich themselves, tirelessly minister to the deeply afflicted poor. Indeed, the novel verges on self-satire when the Aikin residence becomes the refuge for not only a sickly orphan and a starving elderly gentleman but also a poor young girl with an “idiot sister,” a mother suffering from “over-exertion,” and a father disabled through a fall from a building (83). The hero of the novel, Harry Aikin, makes clear that the primary motivation for charitable behavior towards these dispossessed figures is not social amelioration—after all, comments the narrator, “[w]e are all . . . to live here a few years—some in one station, and some in another” (112); rather, charity should be given for the purpose of emotional attachment. “[A]s mother used to tell me,” comments Harry, “if you want to love people . . . just do them a kindness, think how you can set about to make them happier, and the love, or something that will answer the purpose, will be pretty sure to come” (11). Sedgwick thus celebrates social asymmetries in lived condition, because it is these which make possible intense emotional correspondence.

Sympathy and its Vicissitudes

In the hands of writers like Catharine Maria Sedgwick sentimentalism can appear as merely a tool of middle-class domination. Its nods to love and emotional attunement serve only to rationalize class hierarchy and to glorify economic deprivation. Indeed, so perverse was Sedgwick’s celebration of poverty and suffering that it prompted Melville’s scathing parody, “Poor Man’s Pudding and Rich Man’s Crumbs.” But it would be inaccurate to say that sentimentalism *only* functions to legitimate social inequities or that sympathetic exchanges always reinforce patterns of sovereignty and submission. Although sentimental transactions are located at hierarchies, these hierarchies need not be static or reified, and in the hands of more nuanced writers they can often result in significant reversals and displacements. While Sedgwick’s focus is limited to the actions and feelings of charitable sympathizers (she very rarely emphasizes the agency of suffering principals), other writers showcase the reactions of *both* members of the sympathetic exchange and in so doing create scenes involving less coherent or predictable patterns of domination.

To understand the theoretical underpinnings behind this latter strategy, I return to Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. As mentioned earlier, in Smith’s model, the spectator of suffering imagines himself in the place of the afflicted party and in so doing achieves a “correspondence” or harmony of feeling. Importantly, however, it is not only the spectator who must work to achieve this harmony but also the sufferer. This sufferer, writes Smith “passionately desires” the sympathetic fellow-feeling of the spectators that surround him; but “he can only hope to obtain this by lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten . . . the sharpness of its natural tone, in order to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him” (22). Significantly, this regulatory action on the

part of the suffering principal is achieved through an imagined place-switching with the sympathizing spectator. As Smith writes, only by entering into the situation of the witness can the sufferer conceive “some degree of that coolness about his own fortune, with which . . . [others] will view it.” For Smith, then, sympathy involves a *mutual* projection into the experience of the other. While the spectator is “constantly considering what [he himself] would feel, if [he] actually were the sufferer, so [is the sufferer] constantly led to imagine in what manner he would be affected if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation” (22).

Smith’s focus on the agency of *both* afflicted principal *and* sympathizing witness is significant because it points to a conception of psychic interaction that is fundamentally reciprocal in nature. His emphasis, in other words, is not on active subject and passive object but on mutually asserting subjects. It involves two fully realized individuals who occupy asymmetrical power positions but who nonetheless contribute equally to the affective exchange. His description seems to anticipate what Jessica Benjamin designates as the realm of intersubjectivity—“that zone of experience or theory in which the other is not merely the object of the ego’s need/drive or cognition/perception but has a separate and equivalent center of self.”³⁶ According to Benjamin, because subjects meet as active independent agents, at once desirous of emotional attunement with others and protective of their own sovereignty, both contribute to an affective exchange that is open-ended and unpredictable, marked by a delicate balance between self-assertion and the need for “recognition.” By conceding a similar mutuality in sentimental fiction, we as readers can focus on the contribution of suffering principals (often the poor, children, slaves, ethnic minorities, etc.), as well as on sympathizing spectators, thus complicating our assumptions about power and victimization. I close then with two sets of readings—the first from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the second from E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand*—which highlight the agency of both members of the sympathetic transaction, producing in the process less predictable, ideologically coherent messages.

As James Baldwin was one of the first to point out, Stowe’s novel, hinging on the “phenomenally forbearing” figure of Tom, may be read as a paean to the fantasy of black submission: “since he is black, born without the light, it is only through humility, the incessant mortification of the flesh, that he can enter into communion with God or man.”³⁷ But reading Tom’s character only in terms of utter degradation overlooks the subtle fluctuations of power that attend his relations with his various oppressors. Augustine St. Clare, for example, is described as a man of “exceeding delicacy of constitution” (239), and his interactions with Tom reveal shifting patterns of power and intimacy. One instance of these follows a night of drunken revelry by St. Clare, which culminates in Tom “assist[ing] to get him composed for the night” (307). In the morning, their conversation runs as follows:

“Why, Tom, what’s the case? You look as solemn as a coffin.”

“I feel very bad, Mas’r. I allays have thought that Mas’r would be good to everybody.”

“Well, Tom, haven’t I been? Come, now, what do you want? There’s something you haven’t got, I suppose, and this is the preface.”

“Mas’r allays been good to me. I haven’t nothing to complain of on that head. But there is one that Mas’r isn’t good to.”

“Why, Tom, what’s got into you? Speak out; what do you mean?”

“Last night, between one and two, I thought so. I studied upon the matter then. Mas’r isn’t good to *himself*.”

Tom said this with his back to his master, and his hand on the door-knob. St. Clare felt his face flush crimson, but he laughed.

“O, that’s all, is it?” he said, gayly.

“All!” said Tom, turning suddenly round and falling on his knees. “O my dear young Mas’r; I’m ‘fraid it will be *loss of all—all—body and soul . . .*”

Tom’s voice choked, and the tears ran down his cheeks.

“You poor, silly fool!” said St. Clare, with tears in his own eyes. “Get up, Tom. I’m not worth crying over.”

But Tom wouldn’t rise, and looked imploring. (307-308)

In its fascinating turns of emotional response, this passage highlights the instability that can attend relations of domination between two highly sensitive men. What does it mean for a slave to help his master undress following a night of intoxication and then to shame him with this fact the morning after? What do we make of a rebuke from a slave (one couched in extreme moderation and uttered “with his back to his master”) can still elicit the feminized response of a crimson flush? How do we interpret the slave who falls to his knees begging not for his own deliverance but for the salvation of his master, and the master who, weepingly and unsuccessfully, implores the slave to stand back up? Surely, these dynamics allow us to recognize a shifting rather than static conception of power, one that complicates—though of course never effaces—the ascendancy of owner over owned.³⁸ In this scene, despite Tom’s social inferiority and his legal status as slave, he succeeds in positioning St. Clare as the true sufferer, or, more accurately, as a tyrant whose abuse of power has been directed inward (“Mas’r isn’t good to *himself*”). During the course of their encounter, then, emotional attunement is achieved (both men cry) but in the atypical context of *afflicted master* and *sympathizing bondsman*. What are revealed in the process are

vicissitudes of feeling—shifting displays of righteousness, abasement, love, rebuke and shame.

Unpredictable patterns of intersubjective intimacy can also be glimpsed in scenes of sympathy involving Little Eva. Eva's primary affective connections are with the slaves of her father's plantation, men and women who provide her with stories of loss and separation. Eva's eagerness to sympathize with these suffering unfortunates is derided by her mother as a "peculiar" tendency "to put herself on an equality with every creature that comes near her" (265). In contrast to Marie St. Clare who insists that servants and their masters must "know their place" (265), Eva engages in continual *place-switching*, imagining herself entering the feelings and circumstances of others. No doubt, Eva derives a certain amount of pleasure from this operation. When asked if she prefers "to live as they do at [her] uncle's, up in [free-soil] Vermont, or to have a houseful of servants" as they do in New Orleans, Eva responds "O, of course, our way is pleasantest. . . . Why, it makes so many more round you to love" (282). In this way, Eva confirms what I have called the sentimental paradox; that is, she embraces social inequity as the necessary agent for emotional attunement.

And yet, Eva's sympathetic practices have another consequence, one which complicates the dynamic of domination implicit in her fantasy of "love." A deeply sensitive girl, she is transformed by stories of slave suffering. "These things sink into my heart" (326). She says of the tragedies she hears; "they [go] down deep" (403). Although she claims that she "ought to know such things" as slaves' misfortunes (403) and that "[i]t ain't so much for me to hear it, as [it is for them] to suffer it" (327), in fact these stories and the intense fellow feeling that follows prove as fatal to Eva as the actual events are to her slaves. She sickens and dies as a result of such stories indicating that for her sympathy has the power to eradicate absolutely the border between self and other.³⁹ This perfect "union" in which there is no differentiation between subjects constitutes the threat of sympathy for Stowe, and I would argue that she showcases Eva's death in part as a cautionary lesson on the dangers of feeling too much, or of over-identification. In so doing, however, Stowe also implicitly comments on the agency of slaves in the sympathetic transaction.

Consider, for example, Eva's exchanges with the slave girl Topsy. Nearly the same age, the two are described in the language of radical alterity. They are "representatives of the two extremes of society." Eva is the "Saxon, born of ages of cultivation, command, education, physical and moral eminence;" Topsy is the "Afric, born of ages of oppression, submission, ignorance, toil and vice" (361-62). During their first encounter, however, Eva speaks "the first word of kindness [Topsy] had ever heard in her life" and this produces in Topsy "a sparkle of something like a tear" (362). With this Stowe obliterates the radical difference between the girls and replaces it instead with a recognition of shared humanity. As readers have noticed, this exchange is problematic, because Eva does not just feel for Topsy here, she enters and transforms her. "[I]n that

moment,” Stowe writes following an especially intense interaction, “a ray of real belief, a ray of heavenly love, had *penetrated* the darkness of [Topsy’s] heathen soul! She laid her head down between her knees, and wept and sobbed . . . ‘O, dear Miss Eva, . . . I will try [to be good]’” (410, emphasis added). In the pages that follow, Topsy becomes a veritable replica of Little Eva, arranging flowers, showing deep feeling, and eventually committing herself to missionary work in Africa. Eva’s fellow-feeling, then, does not just result in Eva becoming (in Adam Smith’s words) “in some measure the same” as the sufferer but also—in an ironic reversal—in her colonizing the sufferer, making her over in the image of herself.

But if such interactions result in Topsy’s domestic appropriation, they also and just as importantly bring about Eva’s death.⁴⁰ Indeed, it is following their initial interaction that we first learn of Eva’s illness and observe her increasingly deteriorating condition. If Eva exerts a kind of imperial agency in these scenes, not just entering Topsy but transforming her, then Topsy is no less active. For in becoming like Eva, Topsy might be described as usurping Eva’s place. (Indeed, in the aftermath of Eva’s death, Topsy becomes the substitute for Miss Ophelia’s affections.) In receiving Eva’s sympathy, Topsy in turn enters Eva and in effect supplants her, thereby achieving what Frantz Fanon has described as the native’s “dream of possession.”⁴¹ What start out looking like benevolent scenes of fellow-feeling, then, end in images of violent displacement. Topsy may learn from Eva “how to feel” and thus assimilate to the sentimental order, but not without first killing off this order’s quintessential representative.⁴²

The reversals that attend Eva and Topsy’s interactions might be understood as the consequences of genuinely reciprocal psychic relations. Eva enters Topsy and takes on her suffering even as she colonizes her; Topsy enters Eva and takes on her sentimental domesticity, even as she helps to kill her off. In this way, both subjects succeed (following Benjamin’s formulation) in “transforming and being transformed by the other,” albeit in less than productive ways. These shifting fantasies of omnipotence and affliction make *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* a difficult work to classify ideologically. Its imperialist fantasy and domesticating impulse, in other words, seem to be in dialogue with contrary albeit equally violent proclivities. This violence does not exclude from Stowe’s novel the presence of compassionate communion. Indeed, as I have been arguing, taking over the other begins with the sympathetic entry into her experience. In Stowe’s imagination, however, the consequences of this entry are varied and unpredictable, culminating in shifting dynamics of domination and love. These vicissitudes may reflect Stowe’s desire to represent the volatility of antebellum social relations or they may be an effect of her own “contradictory consciousness.”⁴³ As Joan Hedrick has pointed out, Stowe was deeply invested in “the slave’s humanity,” but her portraits were also “inflected by a sense of ‘otherness’ . . . [resulting from a] hierarchical perception of a social inferior.”⁴⁴ In either case, the fluid indeterminacy of the Eva-Topsy bond was a way for

Stowe to register conflicting conceptions of master-slave interaction. Moreover, as we shall see, it became a useful template for other authors invested in relations between social unequals.

Unlike Stowe, E.D.E.N. Southworth was little interested in the subjugation of slaves. Of the over fifty novels she wrote between 1849 and the end of her life (1899), only two were explicitly abolitionist and in those her focus was primarily on the heroism and suffering of *whites* under slavery.⁴⁵ Southworth was by no means blind to social injustice, but her true passion and allegiance lay with dispossessed white women—“the hopeless, helpless experience of feminine destitution in a male-dominated society.”⁴⁶ This commitment to women grew out of Southworth’s own experiences of abuse and neglect, first as a child “left to play in a freezing garret and driven away from the fire in the parlor” and later as a deserted wife and mother of two.⁴⁷ Having turned to writing when she could no longer support her children through teaching in the Washington public school system,⁴⁸ Southworth often used her fiction to comment on women’s economic and social confinement in America. At the same time, however, Southworth’s vision often fell well short of feminist critique. Unlike Fanny Fern, who ended her own novel of women’s economic exploitation with the protagonist’s acquisition of a bank note,⁴⁹ Southworth tended to complete her fictions about women with marital rather than financial security. While she championed the right of the destitute woman to work, she did not embrace economic autonomy as an ideal, and for the most part, her novels are populated less by independent female thinkers than by models of classic domestic femininity.

Southworth’s most famous and eclectic novel—*The Hidden Hand* (1859)—speaks to her conflicted understanding of women’s place in America. Enormously influential in its own day, *The Hidden Hand* was serialized in *The New York Ledger* three times before the turn of the century and inspired cross-Atlantic fashion statements (including hats, suits, and boots) as well as numerous stage performances.⁵⁰ Its beloved heroine, Capitola Black, is an unusual figure of American girlhood because she flouts authority and is said to “abhor sentiment.”⁵¹ Indeed, as a swarthy, adventurous girl with a penchant for cross-dressing, Capitola might be said to critique ideologies of womanhood that were circulating in America in the first part of the nineteenth century.⁵² And yet, Southworth’s novel is better described as expanding or reconfiguring the culture of antebellum feminine domesticity rather than rejecting it completely. Consider, for example, Capitola’s exchange with a neighborhood pastor, who having heard of Cap’s wayward behavior and motherless state, determines to offer the girl some Christian counsel. During the course of their conversation, Capitola, amid displays of violent affliction and guilt, confesses to having a young stranger hidden in her closet. Here is how their exchange concludes:

A groan that seemed to have rent his heart in twain burst from the minister, as he repeated in deepest horror: “. . . Wretched girl! better you'd never been born than ever so to have received a man!”

“Man? *man*? MAN?—I'd like to know what you mean by *that* . . .” exclaimed Capitola, lifting her eyes flashing through their tears. . . . “*!—I* give private interviews to a man! Take care what you say . . .!”

“Then if you are not talking of a man, who or what in the world *are* you talking about?” exclaimed the amazed minister.

“Why, Alfred, the Blenheim poodle that strayed away from some of the neighbor's houses, and that I found in the woods and brought home and hid in my closet, for fear he would be inquired after . . . I knew it was wrong, but then he was so pretty—”

Before Capitola had finished her speech, [the minister] had seized his hat, and rushed out of the house in indignation . . . (185).

Far from fully upending social protocol, this scene works to reinforce the theme of womanly chastity even as it mocks it. Capitola remains virtuous throughout the novel and her outrage at suggestions to the contrary (“*!—I* give private interviews to a man!”) are themselves examples of scrupulous female conduct. In this way, Southworth at once satirizes the conventions of nineteenth-century womanhood without subordinating their ideological force. Her novel cannot be dismissed as parody because despite moments of levity and an unusually independent protagonist, its equally salient attention to suffering and morality, along with its inclusion of three female characters who are models of “true womanhood,” lodges it within the sentimental, domestic tradition. Still, as the scene above demonstrates, *The Hidden Hand* participates in this tradition in rich and interesting ways. Here, Southworth invokes all the elements that readers have come to expect from sentimentalism—the contrite and suffering heroine, the stern, admonishing minister, the promise of confession, sympathy, and redemption—only to subvert these in an irreverent display of female craft and wit. Capitola “plays” the part of the afflicted heroine to the minister's patriarchal authority, but the usual structure of power is reversed when Cap exposes the prank and the minister pronounces himself “sold by” her deception (185). In her unusual portrait of trickster girl and bamboozled minister, then, Southworth upends normative social roles and reverses hierarchical dynamics, thereby evidencing the fluid indeterminacy of affective relational bonds.

The exchange between Capitola and the minister reveals the two sides of Southworth's heroine: “Capitola,” the aristocrat, is chaste and well-bred; “Cap” (as she is often called), the street-wise girl, is irreverent and resourceful.

Importantly, it is in this latter characterization that Southworth links her heroine to African American culture. Indeed, although she is white, everything about Cap Black—her name, her dark features, her sexual desirability, her tricksterism and verbal word play, and, of course, that she was mistakenly sold into slavery as an infant—would seem to suggest her affinity with antebellum conceptions of blackness. Thus, while Southworth is unconcerned with the fate of real blacks in *The Hidden Hand* (the plantation slaves in the novel are dismissed as “blockheads” [125], “wretches” [159], and “good-for-nothing . . . loungers” [190]), she uses racialized tropes in depicting her heroine. Such a strategy has a paradoxical effect: it allows Southworth to comment on the theme of white women’s domestic bondage, even as it frees Cap from the constraints of feminine ideology, giving her a measure of freedom and movement not usually afforded white women. Blackness, in other words, liberates Cap from the restrictions of “true womanhood.”⁵³ As we shall see, this results in a certain amount of transgression and surprise in Cap’s relations with those around her.

The novel begins with the young heroine being discovered on the streets of New York by her wealthy guardian and returned to Virginia. There, she encounters a “gilded slavery” (187)—a term that articulates the intersections of racial and gender subjugation—intended to tame her wild, intractable nature. Cap resists this domestication through cunning stratagem. In fact, this “minx of a girl . . . [with] eyes quick and vivacious as those of a monkey” and a special gift for verbal punning seems a version of the Signifying Monkey—the trickster figure who deploys comic antics in an effort to destabilize authority.⁵⁴ More precisely, Cap, I would suggest, is a rewriting of the century’s most famous image of recalcitrant black girlhood—the figure of Topsy. The similarities between the two are highly suggestive: both girls are taken into families to be domesticated, and both delight in their “diablerie” (a word that appears in reference to each). Their names (Top and Cap) are not only phonetically similar, but mean the same thing: to excel, outdo, or surpass. Given that each responds to her own subjugation with plots of masterful revenge, their names speak to the African American tradition of besting or what Henry Louis Gates has called “Signifyin(g) as capping.”⁵⁵

The correlations between Stowe’s fictional creation and Southworth’s become ever more striking in the context of scenes in *The Hidden Hand* between Cap and Clara Day. As her name indicates, Clara (Clear) Day is Southworth’s quintessential, sentimental heroine, a mild, deeply feeling girl, whose blue eyes, golden brown hair, and gentle manner all recall Stowe’s paradigmatic figure of sentimental girlhood, Eva St. Clare. Although Clara generally resides over her own plot-line in *The Hidden Hand*, Southworth brings her in direct contact with Cap for a few key exchanges, that uncannily recall the meetings of Eva and Topsy. In the first, Cap visits the recently-orphaned Clara in a gothic castle where she (Clara) has been taken captive by the novel’s villain. Much like Eva’s pacifying effect on Topsy, Clara’s “melancholy beauty so deeply impress[es]

Capitola that almost for the first time in her life she hesitate[s], from a feeling of diffidence” (281). Clara’s words of kindness issue from “the sweetest voice Capitola had ever heard” (281) and produce, as in the Eva-Topsy dynamic, a profound sympathetic communion:

As they spoke, the eyes of the two young girls met. They were both good physiognomists and intuitive judges of character. Consequently, in the full meeting of their eyes, they read, understood and appreciated each other. The pure, grave and gentle expression of Clara’s countenance, touched the heart of Capitola. The bright, frank, honest face of Cap recommended her to Clara. The very opposite traits of their equally truthful characters attracted them to each other. (282)

Although both Cap and Clara are wealthy and white, their exchange, like that of Topsy and Eva, is figured in the language of radical alterity. It is only in the mutual gaze that each gains access to the personhood of the other and the two are reduced to their essential, affective humanity. As if to prolong the intensity of this exchange, Southworth creates a nearly identical one three chapters later. Having returned to the castle to renew their acquaintance, Cap finds Clara in a state of quiet despair. “Tell me, dear Clara, what is the matter?” begs Capitola. “[H]ow can I help you? What shall I do for you?”

Before trusting herself to reply, Clara gazed wistfully into Capitola’s eyes, as though she would have read her soul. Cap did not blench, nor for an instant avert her own honest, gray orbs; she let Clara gaze straight down through those clear windows of the soul into the very soul itself. . . . (304)

In both these scenes, gazing upon the other is figured as a kind of psychic transport. Clara looks into the eyes of her visitor and in the process achieves a kind of entry into her soul. Her gaze, moreover, is returned in full by Capitola, indicating the important mutuality of their exchange. As in the Eva-Topsy dynamic, this psychic place-switching results in a behavioral transformation into the other. Following their meeting, Clara “contract[s] some of [her] eccentric little friend Capitola’s ways” (326), exhibiting a pluck and bravado heretofore unseen. Cap, for her part, takes on Clara’s characteristic “true womanhood,” “content[ing] herself” for the first time in the narrative “with quiet mornings of needlework” (329). As in the Eva-Topsy dynamic, then, the mutual influence of each member in the sympathetic exchange means that subjects are capable of (to quote Benjamin again) “transforming and being transformed by the other.”

In revisiting Stowe’s dynamic of radical alterity, Southworth thus adopts and converts it, so that sympathy retains its imperial effects but with far less

pernicious results. Indeed, while in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the price of emotional attunement is the co-opting of one subject (Topsy) and the death of the other (Eva), in *The Hidden Hand*, sympathy has more positive consequences.⁵⁶ This is demonstrated in the girls' final exchange, where sympathetic feeling gives way to concerted action. As the two face each other, Clara tells her tale of suffering to Capitola, who responds by suggesting that each girl put on the habiliments of the other and attempt to trade places. In the scene that follows, Clara escapes the clutches of her tormentors by affecting the posture and attitude of her friend, while Cap, now dressed in Clara's mourning robes, performs a burlesque of white domestic womanhood that succeeds in fooling Clara's captors. What starts out, then, as a scene of psychic place-switching culminates in a literal place-switching. This results not only in the continued influence of each girl on the other but also in the subordination of patriarchal authority. For in transforming into the other, each girl hoodwinks her male guardian (Gabriel Le Noir in the case of Clara, Captain Hurricane in the case of Cap) and in the process gains a measure of personal freedom. Clara and Cap's psychological and physical place-switching, then, is not so much a private struggle for domination over the other as it is an allied attempt at female transcendence.

In this way, the Clara-Cap dynamic involves a reciprocity that is not simply reducible to Eva and Topsy's power struggle (or what Jessica Benjamin would call their "complementarity.")⁵⁷ Indeed, sympathy in *The Hidden Hand* leads not to shifting omnipotence but to mutual assistance: because each girl has come to feel for the other, each can provisionally adopt the other's personhood; she can perform a convincing rendition of the other that helps to destabilize masculine domination. Significantly, neither girl is erased or subsumed in the process. On the contrary, the ability of each to parody the behavior of the other indicates the presence of a persistent self that strategically performs a role rather than unconsciously assumes it. In Southworth's vision, the subject exceeds the effects of the sympathetic transaction; Cap and Clara feel for and transform into each other, while still retaining access to a resilient, inviolable self. Of course, this radical understanding of sympathetic exchange—where fellow-feeling is a provisional strategy leading to women's allied subversion of patriarchy—is not sustained in Southworth's text. The novel ends with Cap and Clara's double wedding and the renunciation of Cap's transgressive blackness (through her new surname, Greyson). Nonetheless, Southworth's depiction of the Cap-Clara dynamic points to the potential liberatory effects of sympathy. In their meeting, not only do subjects mutually transform one another, but these transformations form the basis of alliance and social change.

My readings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Hidden Hand* are meant to demonstrate the flexibility of the sympathetic meeting, its ability to register different kinds of interactions even within the limits of a single text. Like many middle-class authors of their time, Stowe and Southworth wrote novels that were ideologically inconsistent. While they attempted to manage exchanges

between privileged and dispossessed subjects, their stories also include surprising eruptions of affect and vicissitudes of feeling, that reflect both the authors' own ideological contradictions and their attempts to portray realistic models of interaction. Recognizing the variety and variability of affective attachments allows us to relinquish static political readings of sentimental fiction and to engage instead in what Eve Sedgwick has called "a fresh, deroutinized sense of accountability to the real."⁵⁸ Such a stance would recognize that sympathy was employed not as a tool of unilateral domination or unambivalent love, but rather as a means of depicting the transformations that attend interpersonal experience. When subjects converge, the result is shifting, reciprocal dynamics, culminating in alternating patterns of aggression, intimacy, and even alliance. By focusing on the particularized, nuanced, and idiosyncratic manifestations of intersubjective dynamics, we as readers begin to grasp the many ways that antebellum social relations were imagined and symbolized.

Notes

1. Joanne Dobson, "Reclaiming Sentimental Literature," *American Literature* 69, (June 1997): 267.

2. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 409. All future citations will appear in the body of the text.

3. See Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

4. Acknowledging these two trajectories, John Kasson inquires, "In a nation in which egalitarian assertions (if not conditions) were rampant, what was the nature of authority? . . . What sustained social bonds when democratic individualism and the pursuit of self-interest could so easily dissolve them?" *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1990), 5-6.

5. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 108-111; Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, 1983), 145.

6. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 125

7. Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man in Herman Melville: Pierre, Israel Potter, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence-Man, Uncollected Prose, Billy Budd, Sailor* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 863-64.

8. Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 163. For other readings of the democratic potential of sentimentalism, see Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 99.

9. Laura Wexler, "Tender Violence: Literary Eavesdropping, Domestic Fiction, and Educational Reform," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 5:1 (1991): 158. Also see, Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987, (1986), 64-68.

10. Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is about You," in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 1-37; Cathy Davidson, "Preface," *No More Separate Spheres!*, a special issue of *American Literature* 70 (September 1998): 443-63.

11. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 49.

12. Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799; reprint, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843), 186. All future citations will appear in the body of the text.

13. On Hannah More's influence on American writers and their ideas about womanhood, see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 206-7, 244-45

14. This is the thesis of Gillian Brown in *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

15. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 473.

16. *Ibid.*, 488.

17. See John Mullan *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1-17.

18. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984), 9. All future citations will appear in the body of the text.

19. For an analysis of the mechanics by which feeling is transmitted to sympathetic subjects and readers, see Franny Nudelman, "Harriet Jacobs and the Sentimental Politics of Female Suffering," *English Literary History* 59 (1992): 944-49.

20. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *A New-England Tale; or, Sketches of New-England Character and Manners* (1822; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 160.

21. Naomi Schor, "French Feminism Is a Universalism" in *Bad Objects: Essays Popular and Unpopular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 8-9.

22. Sedgwick, *A New-England Tale*, 81.

23. The stifling consequences of sentimentalism's emphasis on sameness has been the subject of much recent scholarship. These accounts generally emphasize how appeals to universalism obscure the differences both between subjects and between forms of oppression; see for example Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), especially 91-99; Lauren Berlant, "The Female Woman: Fanny Fern and the Forms of Sentiment," *American Literary History* 3 (Fall 1991): 429-54; Glenn Hendler, "Louisa May Alcott and the Limits of Sympathy," *American Literary History* 3 (Winter 1991): 685-706; Shirley Samuels, "The Identity of Slavery," in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 157-71; Karen Sanchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition," *Representations* 24 (Fall 1988): 28-59; and Robin Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 193-201.

24. "Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it" (Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 12).

25. In arguing for the importance of Eliza's story, I mean to challenge those readings which link sentimentalism solely to the physical presence of bodies. Catharine E. O'Connell, for example, argues that it is "the physical presence of the suffering slave that moves the Bird family" ("The Magic of the Real Presence of Distress': Sentimentality and Competing Rhetorics of Authority" in Mason I Lowance Jr. et al., eds., *The Stowe Debate: Rhetorical Strategies in Uncle Tom's Cabin* [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994], 15). I am arguing by contrast that sympathetic response is contingent not simply on the body of the sufferer but on the effective narration of her suffering. Indeed, in the case of Eliza, her story may elicit tears even when she herself is not present.

26. For an interesting debate about the extent to which reason or emotion dictates the terms of sentimentalism, see Michelle Massé, "When the Personal Doesn't Become the Political," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 1 (1999): 156-57; and Marianne Noble's "Response" in the same volume, 163-65. My own position (similar to Massé's) is that while sentimentalism works through emotional responsiveness, it does not operate to the exclusion of reason. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, Senator Bird's sympathetic response is achieved in the context of a "reflective air" and "deep meditation" (152). It is exactly this residue of reason, I am arguing, that differentiates vicarious from original suffering and, what is perhaps crucial, allows for the sympathizer to actively help the afflicted principal (as Senator Bird does Eliza in Stowe's novel). For an account of the empirical links between emotional and cognitive responses in the body, see June Howard, "What is Sentimentality," *American Literary History* 11 (Spring 1999): 66-68.

27. David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 21.

28. For an account of how sentimentalism breeds passivity, see Fisher, *Hard Facts*, 104-10.

29. Matilda G. Thompson, "Aunt Judy's Story" in *The Child's Anti-Slavery Book* (1859; reprint, New York: Carlton & Porter, 1969), 117.

30. *Ibid.*, 120.

31. Thomas F. Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 164.

32. On the relationship between sentimentalism, exploitation, and forms of sadistic pleasure, see Karen Halttunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," *American Historical Review* 100: 2 (1995): 303-334. Marianne Noble argues that sentimental literature could also be used in the fulfillment of masochistic desire; see "The Ecstasies of Sentimental Wounding in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 10: 2 (1997): 295-

320. On the connection between violence and pleasure in nineteenth-century race relations, see Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

33. Although Smith notes that joy and good fortune are occasions for sympathy no less than is suffering, he insists that the negative emotions create emotional attunement most effectively. Love, for example, “interests us not as a passion, but as a situation that gives occasion to other passions which interest us”; that is, we sympathize less with love itself than with “the distress which that love occasions” (32). Sympathy, then, relies not simply on differences between its participants but on lack and dispossession; hence its frequent complicity with social hierarchy.

34. John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity” (1630) in *Winthrop Papers*, ed. Stewart Mitchell, 6 vols. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1931), 2: 282-83.

35. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837), 11-12. All future citations will appear in the body of the text.

36. Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 30. Benjamin’s paradigm differs markedly from the classical Freudian model where transformation is uni-directional and achieved through the internalization of the other. As object relations theorists have pointed out, Freud’s drive-oriented model of identification leaves little room for more dynamic play between ego and “object”; see, for example, Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), especially 70-74.

37. James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” in *American Literature, American Culture*, ed. Gordon Hutner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 337.

39. As P. Gabrielle Foreman points out, recognizing Tom’s agency does not amount to negating his entrenched position as slave. In her readings, Tom is transformed into a desiring sexual subject, but one “who never can wield his sexual ‘power’ effectively enough to achieve . . . freedom” (“‘This promiscuous Housekeeping’: Death, Transgression, and Homoeroticism in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” *Representations* 43 [Summer 1993], 67).

39. Philip Fisher was the first to suggest this widely accepted thesis concerning Little Eva’s death; see *Hard Facts*, 103.

40. For this observation, I am indebted to Nancy Armstrong, “Why Daughters Die: The Racial Logic of American Sentimentalism,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7: 2 (1994): 13. For Armstrong, the sympathetic exchanges between the two girls compromise the purity of Eva contributing to a narrative logic in which daughters must die. By contrast, I am more concerned with the extent to which these exchanges and Eva’s resulting demise comment on the power and agency of Topsy.

41. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 39.

42. On the relationship between identification and violence/imperialism, see Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 17-23.

43. Joan Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 209.

44. *Ibid.*, 210.

45. Southworth’s own record on abolition was sketchy. Although her biographer states that Southworth was “avowedly antislavery in feeling,” she adds that these feelings were “not apparent in all her works; in fact, in many instances it would seem that she was favorable towards the institution. Happy slaves are more numerous in her work than unfortunate negroes” (Regis Louise Boyle, *Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, Novelist* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1939], 77, 82).

46. Joanne Dobson, “Introduction,” *The Hidden Hand* (1859; reprint, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), xx.

47. Southworth quoted in *Ibid.*, xv.

48. Nina Baym, *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 111.

49. See Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall and Other Writings* (1855; reprint, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

50. Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 27; Frank Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Seller in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1947), 141.

51. E.D.E.N. Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*, 123. All future citations will appear in the body of the text.

52. Dobson, “Introduction,” xxvii. For a description of nineteenth-century ideologies of womanhood, see Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-74.

53. For an extended reading of Cap’s relation to blackness and its liberatory potential, see Katharine Nicholson Ings, “Blackness and the Literary Imagination: Uncovering The Hidden

Hand," in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 131-150.

54. On the Signifying Monkey and tricksterism, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Jeanne Rosier Smith, *Writing Tricksters: Mythic Gambols in American Ethnic Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

55. Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 146.

56. Of course Southworth's optimism about social interactions between unequals is misleading. Her model of alterity is a false construction, obscuring the fact that her two protagonists are more similar than different. Cap's domestication may be a rewriting of Topsy's, in other words, but it is the absence of real racial hierarchy that necessitates that no one need die.

57. Benjamin describes "complementarity" as a reversible relation in which "each person can play only one role at a time: one person is recognized, the other negated; one is subject, the other object." Omnipotence thus "shifts . . . from one partner to the other" (*Like Subjects, Love Objects*, 43).

58. Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading," 2.