SENTIMENTAL SPECTACLES: THE SENTIMENTAL NOVEL, NATURAL LANGUAGE, AND EARLY FILM PERFORMANCE

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

March 2004

"Sentimental Spectacles: The Sentimental Novel, Natural Language, and Early Film Performance" a dissertation prepared by Hilary Hart in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of English. This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:

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An Abstract of the Dissertation of

Hilary Marie Hart for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of English to be taken March 2004

Title: SENTIMENTAL SPECTACLES: THE SENTIMENTAL NOVEL, NATURAL LANGUAGE, AND EARLY FILM PERFORMANCE

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The nineteenth-century American sentimental novel has only in the last twenty years received consideration from the academy as a legitimate literary tradition. During that time feminist scholars have argued that sentimental novels performed important cultural work and represent an important literary tradition. This dissertation contributes to the scholarship by placing the sentimental novel within a larger context of intellectual history as a tradition that draws upon theoretical sources and is a source itself for later cultural developments.

In examining a variety of sentimental novels, I establish the moral sense philosophy as the theoretical basis of the sentimental novel's pathetic appeals and its theories of sociability and justice. The dissertation also addresses the

aesthetic features of the sentimental novel and demonstrates again the tradition's connection to moral sense philosophy but within the context of the American elocution revolution. I look at natural language theory to render more legible the moments of emotional spectacle that are the signature of sentimental aesthetics.

The second half of the dissertation demonstrates a connection between the sentimental novel and silent film. Both mediums rely on a common aesthetic storehouse for signifying emotions. The last two chapters of the dissertation compare silent film performance with emotional displays in the sentimental novel and in elocution and acting manuals. I also demonstrate that the films of D. W. Griffith, especially The Birth of a Nation, draw upon on the larger conventions of the sentimental novel.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My very deep gratitude goes to my advisor Mary Wood, whose fantastic class on the sentimental novel started me off on this project, and whose skillful fostering of my ideas (and me) helped make this the dissertation of my heart. Without the members of my writing group, Carolyn Bergquist, Colleen Broderick, Keiko Kagawa, Allyson Lima, Julia Major, my project surely would have foundered. I am also thankful for the daily prodding and cheering of Dotti "Coach" Schell-Clegg. Thanks also go to Dan Olmstead, who during an especially difficult time gave me a place to live and wrote me notes of encouragement on Winnie-the-Pooh paper. I am also grateful to John Gage for sharing his knowledge of and enthusiasm for nineteenth-century elocution, as well as his collection of period manuals. So many people buoyed me with kindness, patience, and hope, including my beloved cousin Karen Hart and brother Mallory Hart. I also benefited greatly from the friendship, goodwill, good humor, and unyielding encouragement of Lesli Larson. I am grateful beyond measure to John Lysaker, who supported me in every conceivable way, cooked me meals, washed all the dishes and did all the laundry during my protracted sprint to the finish, read drafts of chapters, offered great advice, chanted my name throughout the house at each milestone, and generally bathed me in love and affection.

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INTRODUCTION

> Is it possible to talk about women writers and the sentimental without eliciting the modernist response? It is a knee-jerk reaction without parallel in literary criticism. Ann Douglas wrote before most of the feminist history appeared which has clarified the extent of women's writing and contributions, but that might make little difference to her readers, to all of *us*, who still respond to the way the word *sentimental* is loaded. The word does not mean just emotional fakery. It marks the limits of critical discourse as if they were natural. As an epithet, *sentimental* condenses the way gender still operates as a political unconscious within criticism to trigger shame, embarrassment, and disgust.
>
> -- Suzanne Clark, Sentimental Modernism

The initial academic scholarship on American sentimental literature is marked by the modernist sensibility that Clark has identified. Early critics offered a variety of justifications for a near-wholesale dismissal of the sentimental as a literary tradition while explaining why authors privileged by the academy, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and, to some degree, Nathaniel Hawthorne, were not widely read in their time. The narrative that emerged was of a male, intellectual tradition that during the nineteenth century had to swim against a tide of feminine, emotionally wrought, and anti-intellectual literary production. These overtly commercial works flooded the literary market and turned tastes away from serious literature. The frustrating experience faced by these male authors, in this narrative, was the nineteenth century corollary to the

experience of the beleaguered modernist avant-guard fighting against the kitsch and commercialism of their own time.

Moreover, these early critics reserved their deepest disgust for the feelings depicted and provoked by sentimental novels. In The Feminine Fifties (1940), Fred Lewis Pattee accounts for the great success of sentimental literature with a national hysteria that overtook America in the 1850's. In his first chapter he says that before settling on the term *feminine,* he cast about looking for a term, an "'f' word," that would encapsulate all the other "f" words that describe the era: "*fervid, fevered, furious, fatuous, fertile, feeling, florid, furbelowed, fighting, funny*" (3). The feminine literary tradition that was a product of this time of heightened feeling Patee characterizes as the "great mass of feminine fiction" (115) forming that "incredible vacuum in the history of American letters" (118). The emotions that this body of work provoked became, in Pattee's assessment, a kind of drug to which the reading public became addicted: "the nerves of the nation, stimulated by the intensity of the times, began to crave added emotional stimulants…" (8). He also depicts New York, the place where literary reputations were made and celebrated, as a locus of "mob hysteria" (4) and "subject to recurrent intoxicants non-alcoholic…" (146).

Similarly, Helen Waite Papashvily, in All The Happy Endings (1956), likens the interest in one of the most popular sentimental novels of the

nineteenth century to an infectious disease: "In reality there was nothing in The Wide, Wide World to cause this contagious, almost epidemic, melancholia..." as the readers "remember only that all through the book little Ellen wept and they wept with her - on page after page their tears fell together. Yet strangely no one can recall just why - except it was sad - *so* sad - so *very* sad" (8). Inherent in Papashvily's bafflement at the tears shed in and over The Wide,Wide World is the assumption that neither has any basis in authentic emotion. The readers were simply the passive victims of a vast literary contagion the symptoms of which were tears.

Ann Douglas in The Feminization of American Culture (1977) regards the pathetic appeals that are the hallmark of sentimental fiction as encouraging an empty aesthetic and narcissistic experience of one's own exquisite feelings, rather than an attempt by the authors to engage the affections in a call to action. Douglas depicts the Victorian female reading public as if they were occupying a kind of mass opium den in which women lay "prostrate on chaise lounges" and together participated in a "mass dream-life" through a literature that sought not to "win adherents" to particular views, but "to sustain and encourage the habit of reading itself" (10).

According to Pattee, Papashvily, Douglas, and Brown readers form an uncritical mass. Douglas claims that authors only required "offhand" attention

from their readers (9). An emotional, especially a tearful response, is likened again and again to a state of unthinking, and an affinity for this type of reading experience compared to an addiction or an illness. Douglas and Pattee repeatedly us the words "mass" or "mob" to describe the women who read sentimental novels. So, if this undifferentiated mass of readers was addicted, half-asleep, or sick, then, they are not suitable for, or capable of judging true literary merit.

If popular novels were of poor quality, one might fallaciously conclude that a writer's unpopularity was a mark in favor of literary merit. This seems the basis for the shared agenda of all these critics: to account for the lack of popularity of the American authors that they believe deserve academic attention. Pattee certainly sees it this way: Moby Dick was a failure because, "It was not in accord with the fifties that gave it birth. Those who had wept over The Wide, Wide World, avoided it as a course and brutal thing" (34). Worse than that, the mass succeeded in the temporary emasculation of Melville's work: Because the "ladies were shocked" by his work, Harper's reissue of Typee was Bowdlerized (30).

If reading – and especially reading and weeping over – sentimental literature is indulging in an uncritical practice, the writing of these texts is characterized as a similarly thoughtless process: "writing," or rather scribbling.

The critics I have named frequently refer to and reprint the famous portion of Nathaniel Hawthorne's letter to his publisher in which he refers to his more popular colleagues as "a d----d mob of scribbling women," and the repetition of this phrase without any kind of critical analysis lets it stand as a pretty good assessment of successful female literary production of the time.[1] For Pattee, women authors wrote emotionally charged novels because "Eras of intense emotion blow off at times like superheated engines" (146). In other words, the writers were passively functioning like a collective blow hole. For Papashvily, the emotion in these novels and the tears shed by the readers are a displaced and watered-down version of the very *real* injustices *not* depicted in the novels that the women writers and readers experienced in "real life." Papashvily asks the question, "Why [did] readers, mostly women, [take] such morbid pleasure in crying over declines in deathbeds, sepulchers and cemeteries" (10)? She found all that feeling unaccountable unless one looked at it as a stand in for real pain and suffering:

> ...the tremendous audience who wept over the pages for more than half a century shared a common lot. In a world made for men they were women. Law custom and theology told them they were inferior. Experience proved to them that they were not. Day after

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[1] Chapter 9 of The Feminine Fifties actually takes its title from the phrase; chapter 5 of All The Happy Endings is entitled "The Scribbling Women"; and the title page of book two, "The Sentimental Years, 1820-1860," of Brown's The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860 has a reprinted portion of Hawthorne's letter.

> day, year after year women lived within the frustrating confines of this contradiction, and gathered "scattered sorrows," reasons to weep, from the injustices they could not understand and customs they could not change. (11)

This conception of emotional displacement not only renders the novels Papashvily refers to as culturally and experientially irrelevant (tangential at best), but the authors as poor and perhaps incapable commentators on the experiences of patriarchal oppression that they shared with their readers. Papashvily goes on to argue that the literature they produced expressed a repressed version of the resentment that the authors had toward the men in their lives, and that the authors indirectly attempted to cut those men down by writing themselves as superior. The upshot of this argument is that the emotion invoked by these novels was inauthentic, misguided, and not entirely deliberate.

Ann Douglas, the most famous and most quoted of these critics, argued in The Feminization of American Culture that the feeling aroused by the death of "Little" Eva in Uncle Tom's Cabin was ineffective and instead "decorative," and that readers' identification with her (Douglas includes her own girlhood identification) had more to do with nostalgia and narcissism than actual pathos.[2] Douglas goes on to contend that "Little" Eva and other sentimental heroines

[2] I put quotation marks around "Little" because "Little" did not originally accompany Eva St. Clair's name with any consistency. Douglas is adding level of preciousness not originally present.

actually prepared young girl readers for "that exultation of the average which is the trademark of mass culture" and the "childish predecessor of Miss America, of 'Teen Angel,' of the ubiquitous, everyday, wonderful girl about whom thousands of popular songs and movies have been made" (4).

Instead of displaced feeling, Douglas regards the emotion in sentimental novels as out and out fakery: "The minister and the lady were appointed by their society as champions of sensibility. They were in the position of contestants in a fixed fight: they had agreed to put on a convincing show, and to lose. The fakery involved was finally crippling for all concerned" (12). Socially crippling because, according to Douglas, this "show" undermined the Calvinist tradition that might have stopped the progress of mass consumer culture.

The critical consensus of early scholarship on sentimental literature is that the form's most salient feature, its emotion, is really *emotionalism*. All the tears that these works so famously produced are then not the evidence of the efficacy of the genre's conventions and the writers' talent, but the mark of bad taste and poor judgment. The sentimental novel, as conceptualized by the critics I summarize, is this feminine Other triply signified by its female authorship, the feeling it depicts and arouses, and the feminine topics of children, family, and home. This literary body of work is an Other because it is used as the negative model against which "real" and "serious" American letters have traditionally

been measured. Literary merit comes from *not* being domestic, *not* being emotional, and by extension, *not* being feminine.

By invoking these scholars I may appear to be resurrecting a type of scholarship already properly and thoroughly put to rest by feminist scholars. However, I believe that their indictment of emotion and of female readers and writers hangs like a specter over more current scholarship and is at large in American culture. The problem with Pattee, Papashvily, Douglas, and also Herbert Ross Brown's characterizations of sentimental literature and its readers is that they stultified scholarship on the sentimental novel's signature feature, emotion, and helped create a feminine literary Other that is still very much alive.

In her new introduction for the 1993 edition of Woman's Fiction, Nina Baym writes that back in 1978 she avoided the term sentimental, or as she latter calls it the "*s* word," because it was "so negatively connotative that to use it would be to lose in advance any case for finding woman's fiction at all interesting" (xxix). As a result, Baym's study had to leave out books that did not meet the narrow definition of woman's fiction, including Uncle Tom's Cabin. Mary Kelley used the designator "literary domesticity," and Susan K. Harris settled on the term "exploratory text" in her book 19th-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretive Strategies (1990).

All of these scholars have a number of reasons for choosing the terms they have, some of which may have little to do with avoiding the term that was initially used so derisively, but their choices are significant. For Harris, the *exploratory text* signaled the drive of her interpretive mode, which was ostensibly designed to add to the criticism that was "Clearing away the misogynism of the early critics..." (11). However, rather than directly acknowledge the power of the sentimental novels, she focused on a "cover plot" which "covers the subversive intentions" of the author, ones of which she is not necessarily altogether aware. Harris instructs that "What a text, employing narrative conventions and reflecting cultural codes, *thinks* it is saying (or pretends to be saying) and what it may be saying to some readers are not necessarily the same thing" (33). In light of this slippage, Harris counsels that we "trust the tale and not the teller" (33). Such an "against the grain" reading still repudiates, however, the emotionally charged didacticism characteristic of sentimental novels, rhetoric that by design counters prevailing law, custom, and patriarchal dominion. Thus while rescuing the novels, Harris replicates Papashvily's strategy of regarding the authors as damaged and therefore unreliable.

Jane Tompkins was the first critic to apply the term *sentimental* without embarrassment or apology *and* take the works and their authors seriously. In her truly monumental work, Sensational Designs (1985), Tompkins argued that

sentimental novels are good literature (critics before and even after Tompkins have generally held back from this position), exposed the mutability of the mechanisms by which texts are deemed masterpieces, and defended the cultural work sentimental literature performed. Since Tompkins, scholars now look at sentimental novels through their own particular lenses without the misogynist inflection that characterized earlier work. However, the pathetic appeal remains understudied and persists as an un-recovered abject element of sentimental fiction. Also, much of the scholarship that has gone before has disregarded the didactic goals to which the pathetic appeal is so integrally attached. Looking so hard for "transgressive" content threatens to occlude entirely the explicit didactic aims of the novels and persuasive architecture at work. After all, is the rest, the parts that the culture at-large embraced, just filler?

The depiction of female literary production and taste as schmaltzy, inauthentic, commercial, mass culture still has currency, and if you doubt this, just review Jonathan Franzen's comments when his book The Corrections was chosen for Oprah Winfrey's Book Club. In an interview with Terry Gross on her radio show Fresh Air, Franzen said that he was surprised and expressed concern that his book was chosen. He considered his book "too edgy for an Oprah pick" and didn't think it fit with in the often "middle-brow" tastes of Oprah's Book Club. In an interview with Dave Welch for Powells.com, Franzen commented

that while Winfrey chooses some "good books," she picked enough schmaltzy, one dimensional ones that I cringe..." Franzen contextualized his own work as being "literary" (Fresh Air) and himself as serious author (Powells.com). He also worried that his book had even less of a chance of reaching a male public, and lamented that authors like him did not have an audience they could count on like the women authors who more typically get chosen for Oprah's Book Club (Fresh Air). In other words, Franzen's conception of himself as artistic depends upon the feminine literary Other, and the formal acknowledgement of his book as read by a huge group of women readers and the commercial success that comes from being an Oprah pick threatens his credibility as a serious, non-commercial, edgy artist.

Pick up any critically acclaimed movie or book whose topic is women, children, or the home and one finds the word *unsentimental* among its praises. *Unsentimental* rescues a work that strays too close to the Other, that has one or more of its markers. A critic can often use the word unsentimental to do this, but when work undeniably provokes and successfully evokes emotion, unsentimental will not do. Such is the case in David Denby's review in The New Yorker of Central Station, a film about a woman, an orphaned boy, and their mutual spiritual renewal. Denby goes through contortions trying to head off being called a softy or uncritical. He places Central Station comfortably in the

critically acceptable tradition of Neorealism.[3] He assures his readers (and other critics) that the film's lead, Fernanda Montenegro's emotional range is achieved "without apparent calculation" (i.e., not fake). He also implies that perhaps the character is close to Montenegro's life: "Spontaneity of that power can be attained, perhaps, only by an equal devotion to acting and to life." He claims that the film is much better than all the "clichés it will call forth." After all this careful positioning and deflecting, Denby concludes, "It's all right, I think, just this time, to cry."

Because the sentimental novel has been for so long an utterly discredited literary tradition, and even now serves the culture as the vague but potent negative image of serious art, its contributions to cultural history have been overlooked. The feature films of D. W. Griffith are acknowledged as deeply sentimental, but no one has ever established a connection between the literary tradition of the sentimental novel and Griffith's work. As melodrama, Griffith's films centralize affect and share with the sentimental the subject matters of women, children and the family, and very often the setting of the home. However, cinematic melodrama escaped being corralled in with the artistic Other by its masculine associations. Film melodrama initially came to the

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[3] Cenrtal Station does resemble Neorealism in that one of the main actors is a non-professional and the film takes on the social ills of poverty and juvenile homelessness.

attention of *auteur* critics who focused on the mastery of male directors like Alfred Hitchcock and, in the case of melodrama, Douglas Sirk. However, when theorizing about the "melodramatic imagination," Peter Brooks cites French pantomime, Balzac, and theatrical melodrama as contributors, but never the hugely popular form that preceded film in America, the sentimental novel.[4]

Sentimental fiction's theoretical sources also have received little attention. The nineteenth-century American sentimental novel has traditionally been regarded as the philosophically poor cousin to the eighteenth-century British version. In The Sentimental Novel in America 1789-1860 (1940), Herbert Ross Brown takes the position that American sentimental novels had little philosophical grounding, and what could be found was derived from British novels rather than directly from philosophy. Moreover, these philosophical remains – the ideas of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Adam Smith – Brown dismisses as not really serious (176). Similarly, in her epilogue to Sensibility, An Introduction (1986), Janet Todd expresses the opinion that the popular American domestic novel is a clichéd version of eighteenth-century sentimental literature, unsupported by a philosophical context (148). Ann Douglas is also famous for making the case that the women authors of American sentimental fiction not

[4] When Peter Brooks' Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess was published in 1976, the recovery work on the American sentimental novel had not yet been performed.

only eroded the intellectual traditions upon which the sentimental novel (and the nation) were founded, but provided a medium for an escape from thought altogether. I take my dissertation to remedy some of the ill treatment the sentimental novel has suffered.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the discursive features of the sentimental novel, drawing out the ideological framework that facilitates its didactic projects. In doing so I establish the novel's grounding in moral sense philosophy, especially in relation to the theoretical basis of the sentimental novel's pathetic appeals and its theories of sociability and justice. I also reassess the feminine virtues that the sentimental novel promotes and relate them to the sentimental's social theory. In arguing that the sentimental creates an imaginary where ideals and social utopia are put in critical confrontation with "the world as it is," I address the racial implications of a discourse so closely associated with white, middle-class subjectivity. Many writers of sentimental fiction were women of color, who both worked within the tradition and also revised the exclusionary aspects of the sentimental tradition. I also attend to the "unintended readers" of sentimental fiction to discuss the possible cultural effects of sentimental fiction beyond its immediate readers and writers.

Chapter 2 addresses the aesthetic features of the sentimental novel and demonstrates again the tradition's connection to moral sense philosophy but

within the context of the American elocution revolution. I look at natural language theory to render more legible the moments of emotional spectacle that are the signature of sentimental aesthetics. I place a number of influential elocutionary texts side-by-side with sentimental novels to argue that they share an emotional lexicon and the theoretical source of natural language.

In Chapter 3, I argue that silent film performers relied upon the physical lexicon of emotion theorized by natural language, described by rhetoricians, employed in the sentimental novel, illustrated in elocution and acting manuals, and taught in professional acting schools. I argue that the theories of natural language continue to dominate schools of expression as well as popular acting and elocution manuals. In looking at D. W. Griffith's feature films, I argue that actors continue to rely on the conventionalized acting style far longer than represented by current historical models contend.

In Chapter 4, I provide more evidence from Griffith's films that the storehouse of oratorical gestures and emotional lexicography persists as a primary source of performance signs for actors. I also argue that The Birth of a Nation draws upon the larger conventions of the sentimental novel, but in making its argument in favor of white supremacy it subverts the central projects of the sentimental novel.

CHAPTER 1

SENTIMENTAL FICTION AND THE UTOPIC IMAGINARY

Much of the scholarship on the nineteenth-century American sentimental novel has concerned itself with the cultural work that particular sentimental novels perform.[1] This chapter is concerned with bringing into relief the mechanisms by which that cultural work is performed, mechanisms that cut across the sentimental novels of this period. In order to do cultural work, the novels draw upon what I call *sentimental discourse* to create a kind of utopic imaginary, a fictional space to imagine how the world should be. Within the imaginary, characters exhibit ideal reactions to hardship and create for themselves an ideal domestic community. This chapter establishes the ideological framework integral to the sentimental novel's persuasive structure.

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[1] Jane Tompkins began the discussion about cultural work with her book Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860. Tompkins' scholarship has been deeply influential in my conception of sentimental discourse and aesthetics. Philip Fisher also discusses Uncle Tom's Cabin in terms of cultural work; specifically the work Stowe's novel did to alter the legal and subjective status of blacks as persons instead of property. He identifies the central sentimental project as helping "the weak and the helpless within society gain by means of sentimental experience full representation through the central moral category of compassion" (95). While this is often the case, I argue that sentimental fiction has even larger designs on the world: To reconceive not just the status of particular groups but revise the criteria by which anyone earns the fruits of civil society. In Reconstructing Womanhood, Hazel Carby discusses the cultural work black women authors performed in revising conventional definitions of motherhood and womanhood to include rather than exclude black women and speak to the experiences of black women during slavery. Gillian Brown's work on Stowe is close to my own in that she identifies the home and domestic economy as the site for imagining a self counter to the market society's construction of self.

The following chapter discusses the aesthetic features of the sentimental's persuasive appeals. Both the discursive features that I outline in this chapter and the aesthetic features discussed in the following chapter have implications far beyond the set of sentimental novels taken up by this dissertation. As a dominant discourse, the sentimental informs the structure and appearance of pathetic appeals in other mediums, specifically silent film. Exposing the discursive elements of the sentimental brings into relief their origins in moral sense philosophy and their dialectical relationship to rhetorical theories prominent in American critical thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In addition to providing a place to imagine the world as it should be, the sentimental novel puts that ideal in conversation with "the world as it is." The ideal is juxtaposed with a version of the actual. Uncle Tom's Cabin, for instance, is full of stereotypic characters and ideal responses to suffering and injustice, but Stowe places those characters in situations drawn from life. In the interest of making explicit the connections between settings and instances that had basis in lived experience, Stowe wrote A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin.[2] Similarly,

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[2] The complete original title of Stowe's key is A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin; presenting the original facts and documents upon which the story is founded. Together with corroborative statements verifying the truth of the work. Stowe was especially interested in detailing the

Catharine Maria Sedgwick makes use of specific historical events and figures to provide an alternate version of encounter between native peoples and Puritan settlers. With Our Nig Harriet Wilson uses the conventions of the sentimental novel to write a fictional third person autobiography that documents and comments ironically upon the racist climate of the North. Ruth Hall dramatizes a number of social ills faced by nineteenth-century women, especially those brought about by their legal and financial dependence. Even the many novels that fit Nina Baym's description of "woman's fiction," and stay so completely within the domestic sphere, like The Wide, Wide World and The Lamplighter, depict the everyday trials of girls and young women in their struggles for love and independence in the face of isolation and oppression.

In performing the contrast between the "world as it is" and "as it should be," sentimental novels offer a theory of power, an account of why there is injustice and how to recognize and remedy it. The discursive profile that emerges is a profoundly feminine one. First, sentimental discourse relies on notions of virtue associated with women and fundamental to contemporary conceptions of femininity. Second, sentimental discourse proposes a version of the self that is largely defined by relationships with others, a definition of self

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instances in the novel when she drew upon actual practices of slavery and the experiences of slaves.

that reflects the lived experiences of nineteenth-century women and of the authors themselves.[3] Finally, sentimental discourse privileges the susceptibility to feeling, a trait definitive of feminine nature.[4]

What I have defined as sentimental discourse did not begin in America or with American authors but rather began in Europe. At its root, however, sentimental discourse was feminine. As Nancy Armstrong has so persuasively argued, at its emergence in the eighteenth century the novel served as a platform for the political voice of its middle-class writers. However, the authors used gender to disguise the political nature of their writing. These authors gave their novels titles bearing female names, signaling that because the female narrators had no power or political authority, the works themselves could not be considered political. Moreover, these eighteenth-century novels took as their setting the private, non-political sphere of the home, were concerned with feminine interests, and ostensibly addressed an audience of women. The

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[3] Mary Kelley has written extensively about the educations and private lives of the authors of American sentimental fiction, the group of women she calls literary domestics. In Private Woman, Public Stage, Kelley discusses the split many successful authors felt between a private "inner self," as Catharine Maria Sedgwick put it, and a public literary persona. This private self was largely defined by the writer's familial relationships. Even when an author achieved fame and fortune, Kelley argues, she was never fully professionalized and identified herself in terms of her relationship to family.

[4] I am not suggesting here that susceptibility to feeling is an essential trait of women but rather that during the nineteenth century the idea that women were the more feeling of the sexes was generally accepted.

heroines of such novels as Pamela, Evelina, or The Mysteries of Udolpho exhibit qualities of mind and emotion attached to gender but which also stand for the characteristics that distinguish the middle-class from the aristocracy. The authors cast class difference as gender difference, and the struggle between competing political ideologies was situated as sexual encounter. For example, Pamela responds to Mr. B's sexual advances according to her "sophisticated range of sensations, emotional nuances, and moral judgements" (Armstrong 29). In this way,

> Domestic fiction mapped out a new domain of discourse as it invested common forms of social behavior with the emotional values of women. Consequently, these stories of courtship and marriage offered their readers a way of indulging, with a kind of impunity, in fantasies of political power that were the more acceptable because they were played out within a domestic framework where legitimate monogamy – and thus the subordination of female to male – would ultimately be affirmed. In this way, domestic fiction could represent an alternative form of political power without appearing to contest the distribution of power that it represented as historically given. (Ibid)

While gender may have initially functioned primarily as a cover for political discourse, the rhetorical maneuvers Armstrong describes resulted in certain kinds of authority for women, and even a "basis…on which a feminine subculture sought to extend women's power" (Armstrong, 56). The focus on female experience, the domestic setting, and the idea that women were the

source of important emotional, psychological and moral qualities equipped women with a sanctioned and even privileged "sphere" of authority from which to write. Even in the eighteenth-century domestic novel this feminine sphere was not entirely separate or subordinate to masculine identities. After all, the desiring male characters like Mr. B were expected to take on the qualities of the beloved in order to become desirable themselves. In other words, while the feminine sphere of home and heart was separate from that of the masculine sphere of commerce and politics, the sphere accorded women a certain authority over men.

The ideology of the spheres is based on the idea that, as Armstrong puts it, "essential differences distinguished men from women and gave each powers that the other did not possess" (56). While much scholarship has focused on the limitations of the sphere, most especially Barbara Welter's Dimity Convictions, the ideology of separate spheres went some distance to recover women from their subordinate place in Christian cosmology. According to traditional Christian cosmology men are possessed of a superior intellect and a greater capacity for rationality than women, who are more thoroughly governed by the drives of the body. This conception of male and female difference served as the rationale for a social and spiritual gender hierarchy, with men, who have a

greater capacity for spiritual communion with god, properly ruling over their irrational and body-bound female inferiors. The idea of separate qualities and therefore separate spheres of action undoes to some degree this hierarchical notion of gender difference, and according women a superior moral sense goes some distance further. Finally, influenced by moral philosophy, sentimental novels portrayed sympathy and morality as a physical experience of emotion. Women's susceptibility to feeling and their "bodiliness" then become assets, as female characters have a greater sensitivity to moral feeling.

The American nineteenth-century sentimental novel retained the trappings of the non-political while serving, once again, as a platform for a political voice, this time for women authors in particular. The eighteenth-century novel established the home and women's experiences as topical, giving women the authority to write about their own experiences. Moreover, since writing is a private act, women could do so without violating the doctrine of the spheres. In writing from the home, about the home, women were committing a non-political act. However, issues of home, whether you have one for instance, quickly become political. For white authors a primary critical confrontation in the American version of the sentimental novel concerns the gendered ideologies that governed each sphere. In other words, white writers of sentimental fiction

had ideas about how the public spheres might better be managed based on their own feminine discourse. For authors of color, the difficulties of living without rights, without power, and without the sympathies of those with power are capital issues. Moreover, women authors of color, especially black women authors, had to contend with a version of femininity that excluded them.

Finally, it is important to note that the sentimental actively promotes a middle class ideology; in fact, Stowe and her sister Catherine Beecher were absolutely explicit about promoting a middle-class version of domesticity because they regarded it as the only way to live by the country's democratic (and Christian) ideals.[5] The problem with such a dominant decidedly middle-class and white ideology is it can make others of anyone who is not white, middle-class, or participate in the domestic life depicted by the sentimental novel. Laura Wexler argues that scholarship that has focused on the debate between Jane Tompkins, who argues that the sentimental novel represents a powerful and specifically feminine literary tradition, and Ann Douglas, who argues that sentimental novels promoted narcissism and passivity crippling to its readers, overlooks the real damage that these books did: "The direct and indirect effect of widespread reading of midnineteenth-century sentimental fiction upon those

[5] These views are expressed in The American Woman's Home: or, Principles of Domestic Science, co-authored by Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

who were not either critics or white, middle-class, Christian, native-born readers is by in large left out" (13). This focus on the "Douglas-Tompkins debate" Wexler argues, "has tended to elide, the expansive, imperial project of sentimentalism" (15). The "unintended" readers of sentimental fiction were the victims of its colonizing tendencies.

In "Tender Violence: Literary Eavesdropping, Domestic Fiction, and Educational Reform" Wexler examines the fate of Native American children taken from their families, placed in white-run boarding schools, and forced to look, act, and speak like little white children. Such practices, Wexler argues, are the outcome of what Phillip Fisher identified as the sentimental novel's experiment with extending "full and complete humanity to classes of figures from whom it has been traditionally withheld" (17).[6] According to Wexler, in promoting this extension, "Sentimentalism encourages a large-scale imaginative depersonalization of those outside its complex specifications at the same time that it elaborately personalizes, magnifies, and flatters those who can accommodate to its image of an interior" (17).

Depersonalization occurs when others are welcomed not in their alterity but in their familiarity. However, some sentimental novels present and promote

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[6] Here Wexler is quoting from Fisher's Hard Facts: Setting and form in the American Novel.

cultural encounters that include the hermeneutic process necessary for acknowledging an unknown subjectivity. In Hope Leslie, Magawisca is first introduced as a Pequot, "the daughter of one of their chiefs, and when this wolfish tribe were killed, or dislodged from their dens, she, her brother, and their mother, were brought with a few others captives to Boston" (21). Already she and her people are described as less than human, as predatory creatures best killed or driven off from the dens they call home. Magawisca's subjectivity is not just unknown to the white family she is sent to, but already conceived of in a negative light. Later Magawisca has an occasion to tell Everell Fletcher her version of the murder of her family and tribe, not as the military defeat that is the official story Everell knows, but as the massacre she witnessed. In her narrative, the wolves in dens are transformed for Everell into families sleeping in their homes, betrayed and murdered. Magawisca also expressed outrage that those whom her family had once hosted in their homes returned to violate and destroy them: "Then was taken from out hearth-stone where the English had been so often warmed and cherished, the brand to consume our dwellings" (49). Later in the novel, when Hope's sister, who had been living with Magawisca's people since she was very small, Hope is distraught that her sister wears native dress and cannot remember her original language. Hope's attempts to convince her

sister to change her dress and remain in Boston rather than return to the Pequots and her husband are regarded as misguided.

Moreover, Wexler ignores the textual specificity of sentimental elements. Wexler lays at the feet of the sentimental novel, or rather the sentimental as a cultural category, the fates of many Native American children in the nineteenth century, which was removal from their families for preparation as domestic help in white homes. The parting of children from their parents is a principal evil of the sentimental novel, as is denying them comfort and sympathy. Furthermore, Harriet Beecher Stowe and her sister, Catherine Beecher, were absolutely opposed to the use of house servants on the grounds that it was an undemocratic practice. Thus, while Wexler notes an important problem, her categorical condemnation of the sentimental novel on this score is overstated.

Sentimental Discourse: Virtue & Sympathy

The very orderly and harmonious homes of the sentimental novel figure the utopia possible when the feminine virtues govern. Moreover, the ideal characters that respond to suffering with patience and a strengthened Christian faith represent these principles ruling the individual. However, the utopic home is put in critical confrontation with a version of the "world as it is," complete

with its social failings, injustice, and corruption. In this way, the sentimental novel proposes that the feminine discourse that rules the utopic home, should it extend to the public world, would solve the problems that mark "the world as it is." The foundations of sentimental discourse, its theory of social cohesion and justice are feminine virtue and sympathy. The sentimental novel creates a place to imagine a world shaped by these principles, beginning in the home and extending into public life, while also providing a critique of the kind of public life that devalues these principles.

The feminine virtues essential to sentimental discourse are self-sacrifice, compassion, Christian faith, and domesticity. While sentimental heroines exhibit a variety of other virtues, courage for instance, these are the ones that also inform the discourse's social theory. The virtues I have identified deviate from those Barbara Welter lists in Dimity Convictions as fundamental to the nineteenth century conception of the ideal woman and which the periodical press and popular literature propagated:

> The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues - piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister wife - woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power. (21)

I do not deny that the "Cult of True Womanhood" was a powerful cultural force with which authors of the sentimental novel had to contend and in important ways conform. However, as Frances B. Cogan has demonstrated, the expression of femininity that Welter describes is the most restrictive expression of femininity and of separate spheres ideology. In her review of nineteenth-century periodicals and popular literature Cogan found alongside more circumscribed versions of femininity, expressions of woman- and girlhood that allowed a great deal more latitude. The different findings of Cogan and Welter suggest that the attributes of womanhood were not stable or universally agreed upon, as Welter's quote suggests, but were contested and fluid. The sentimental novel was one arena where this struggle took place. Edna of St. Elmo, for instance, struggles to realize her intellectual ambitions, and in doing so becomes a figure of female genius, which is out of bounds of the more restrictive version of femininity and of the legitimate female sphere of operation.

Submission is a virtue vital to the sentimental heroine, and I have not excluded it as a virtue important to sentimental discourse but have placed it under the rubric of self-sacrifice. Also, the expressions of submissiveness that Welter found in advice literature and the popular press are different from those exhibited by the female characters in the sentimental novels I discuss. For

Welter:

> Submission was perhaps the most feminine virtue expected of women. Men were supposed to be religious, although they rarely had time for it, and supposed to be pure, although it came awfully hard to them, but men were the movers, the doers, the actors. Women were the passive, submissive responders. (27-28)

Submission in the sentimental novel is tied to self-control, an acceptance of that which cannot be changed, and an alliance with God that supersedes the control of oppressive patriarchs. Girls and young women, even in the most conservative versions of the sentimental novel defy fathers to pursue independence or adhere to their own values.

The conception that best describes submission as it appears in the sentimental novel comes from Jane Tompkins' Sensational Designs. Tompkins points out that because women and girls in nineteenth-century America were dependants, an "ethic of submission" was necessary for survival:

> The fact is that American women simply could not assume a stance of open rebellion against the conditions of their lives for they lacked the material means of escape or opposition. They had to stay put and submit. And so the domestic novels made that necessity the basis on which to build a power structure of their own. Instead of rejecting the culture's value system outright, they appropriated it for their own use, subjecting the beliefs and customs that hand molded them to a series of transformations that allowed them both to fulfill and transcend their appointed roles. (161)

Tompkins goes on to argue that when women and girls in sentimental novels submit to fathers and other oppressors the act is more complicated than simply playing the dupe to the culture or becoming "the agents of their own oppression" (162). First, they are exerting control over their passions. Exercising mastery over oneself, Tompkins contends, is exerting a kind of autonomy (162). Second, such a submission is characterized again and again not as a submission to a person but to the will of God. In this way,

> "submission" becomes "self-conquest" and doing the will of one's husband or father brings an access of divine power. By conquering herself in the name of the highest possible authority, the dutiful woman merges her own authority with God's.... By making themselves into the vehicles of God's will, these female characters become nothing in themselves, but all-powerful in relation to the world. By ceding themselves to the source of all power, they bypass worldly (male) authority and, as it were, cancel it out" (163).

Finally, Tompkins contends that in learning to submit, female characters create bonds between one another. In fact, a dominant motif of the sentimental novel is an experienced woman teaching a girl or a younger woman lessons of calm submission:

> The ability to "submit" in this way is presented, moreover, as the special prerogative of women, transmitted from mother to daughter. As the women in these novels teach one another how to "command" themselves, they bind themselves to one another and to God in a holy alliance against the men who control their material destinies" (163).

Clearly, Christian faith is the key to the feminine virtues, and really to the entire discourse I am describing. Without faith submission yields no larger meaning and only the stoic's consolation. To submit to suffering and to sacrifice oneself for another are meaningful acts if one believes s/he is committing a Christ-like act and accepts theodicy. Moreover, the very principles upon which sentimental discourse is founded originate in Christian precepts.

Typically, heroines of the sentimental novel cherish domesticity. Again, this attitude toward home could be regarded as embracing a patriarchal culture's insistence that women belong in the home, and even a perverse making cozy of one's cage. The home *is* the sanctioned sphere of feminine operation, but in the sentimental novel it is also the site of potential utopia, an approximation of the heavenly home, and a place for an earthly communion that approaches the perfect communion of heaven. The home is where characters receive tea and sympathy and share the burdens that they learn to bear with Christian patience. This communion, so often held over a meal, represents the worldly version of the communion that will be found in heaven. The home in the sentimental novel is not the "haven in a heartless world" designed to give men a rest in the evening so that they can be competitive graspers during the day, rather home is the model upon which the sentimental novel seeks to transform the public world.

However, the domestic is only utopian when virtue reigns. In the absence of virtue, the home becomes a dungeon. In Our Nig, Mrs. Bellmont considers Frado as a being from which she extracts labor and money. At one point Mrs. Bellmont exclaims, "'I'll Beat the money out of her, if I ca n't get her worth any other way'"(90). Mrs. Bellmont uses Frado's race as a rationale for excusing herself from any duties that might be owed to another human being. Mrs. Bellmont also demonstrates an awareness that signs of virtue, whiteness, or beauty might garner the sympathies of others, and she does all she can to deny Frado these qualities. She keeps Frado from going to Bible study and winning the attentions of the church-goers in the neighborhood, cuts off her curls, and deprives her of a sunhat so that her skin darkens. Our Nig thus shows that domestic fulfillment is not a racially blind possibility. And yet, in showing how devastating domestic turmoil can be, the novel implicitly reasserts the importance of the domestic for human wellbeing.

A deep concern for the domestic is equally apparent in the novels of racial uplift of the late nineteenth century. There, the first concern of former slaves is the recovery of family and the finding of homes. From that point characters decide what role they would like to play in the formation of the new society. Black women authors also wrote "racially indeterminate" novels with an

unwavering focus on the home. In Megda and The Hazeley Family, the heroines focus on developing characters suitable for successful marriage and domestic life.

Important to note about the racially indeterminate novel is the absence of an explicit critical confrontation between the utopic imaginary of domestic harmony and family cohesion and "world as it is." It is almost as if such a confrontation with the hyper-violent and socially unjust Post-Reconstruction world would over overwhelm the imaginary. Instead, as Claudia Tate has pointed out, this confrontation is abstracted and made allegorical in novels that are racially "reticent," to use Tate's term.

Purity, which Welter lists as fundamental to the nineteenth-century conception of womanhood, I have not included as a virtue fundamental to sentimental discourse, although it is an attribute of nearly all sentimental heroines. Rather than a virtue that female characters struggle to learn, like submission, or that they actively demonstrate or recommend to others, like sympathy, purity is almost an assumed attribute. Purity is not taken up as a central didactic goal in sentimental novels and is not routinely part of the cultural confrontation -- that is for white authors.

Purity is an issue that black women authors address in their sentimental

novels. As Hazel Carby has pointed out, because the dominant culture's version of womanhood privileges purity to the point that a woman without it is less than a woman, this conception of womanhood excludes black women. After all, a practice fundamental to slavery was the sexual exploitation of black women, especially after taking slaves from Africa was outlawed. Purity is also a precondition for the heroines of sentimental novels, and the outward manifestation of purity is whiteness and blushing. This is perhaps nowhere truer than in St. Elmo. Edna's skin grows whiter as the book progresses so that by the end she retains almost no human coloring. Not surprisingly, Augusta Evans, who wrote St. Elmo, also authored the white supremacist novel, Macaria, or, Altars of Sacrifice.

As Carby has argued, writing works that spoke of the experience of black women, the authors had to address the dominant culture's notions about white femininity and their implications for black womanhood:

> Black women, in gaining their public presence as writer, would directly confront the political and economic dimensions of their subjugation. They had to define a discourse of black womanhood which would not only address their exclusion from the ideology of true womanhood but, as a consequence of this exclusion, would also rescue their bodies from a persistent association with illicit sexuality. (32)

Characters occasionally do struggle with desire for an unsuitable beloved,

as Edna does for St. Elmo. Her victories over her love for the Byronic St. Elmo seem to purify Edna, as evidenced by her increasing whiteness. However, the injunctions to remain chaste, to keep out of the clutches of men, to preserve honor even if it should cost you your life are as absent from nineteenth-century American novels as they are prevalent in their eighteenth-century European counterparts. Impurity may be compensated for with other virtues or personal sacrifices. Should a woman "fall," others are instructed to maintain sympathy for her, as is the case in Charlotte Temple. The fault of Charlotte's death is laid at the feet of those too hard-hearted to show her sympathy and give her aid. Susanna Rowson is also quick to point out that any girl might make Charlotte's mistake. Purity is a precondition of the culture largely accepted by white authors, but does not represent a supreme virtue.

Sympathy: The Importance of Feeling

In the American sentimental novel, sympathy serves as the basis for sociability because it keeps egoism in check and reminds people of their duties to one another. The sympathetic response also provides characters in sentimental novels with superior moral guidance. These ideas about sympathy come out of moral sense philosophy of the eighteenth century. For the Earl of Shaftesbury,

Francis Hutcheson, and later David Hume and Adam Smith, sympathy figured prominently in their theories about what it is to be human, how people arrive at moral decisions, and how sociability between people is generated and maintained. Sympathy, the way that these moral philosophers describe it, is to share in the feeling of another. A sympathetic response approximates in the spectator (a word that Smith uses a great deal) whatever feeling s/he witnesses in another, be that feeling happiness or misery. Moral sentiment philosophers were especially interested in pity, the response one has to witnessing the misery of another, and regarded it as a socially beneficial and universal human capacity. Adam Smith writes:

> How selfish man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. (1)

Smith conceives of sympathy as a universal human capacity for disinterested concern in the welfare of others. Elsewhere, Smith suggests that a representation of suffering rather than direct contact with a sufferer is sufficient to excite pity. Third, he regards sympathy, the excitation of pity in particular, as a social force that regulates inequality. When people suffer from want, for

example, others respond with pity and offers of aid. However, in Smith's conception people are rather easily put off by too great a need or too clamorous an expression of grief.

Rousseau is explicit in his "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" (1754) about the political dimensions of the pity. Before there were laws or even knowledge of virtue there was pity to regulate egoism and interest us in the affairs of others:

> It is therefore quite certain that pity is a natural sentiment, which by moderating in each individual the activity of the love of oneself, contributes to the mutual preservation of the entire species. Pity is what carries us without reflection to the aid of those we see suffering. Pity is what, in the state of nature, takes the place of laws, mores, and virtue, with the advantage that no one is tempted to disobey its sweet voice. (55)

In Rousseau's conception, pity is a more powerful for than law or social custom. So why then is there injustice? For Rousseau and for the writers of sentimental fiction, the answer is that the sympathetic response is easily inhibited:

> Reason is what engenders egocentrism, and reflection strengthens it. Reason is what turns man in upon himself. Reason is what separates him from all that troubles him and afflicts him. Philosophy is what isolates him and what moves him to say in secret, at the sight of a suffering man, "Perish if you will; I am safe and sound." No longer can anything but danger to the entire society trouble the tranquil slumber of the philosopher and yank him from his bed. His fellow man may be killed with impunity underneath his window. He merely has to place his hands over his ears and argue with himself a little in order to prevent nature,

> which rebels within him, from identifying with the man being assassinated. (54)

In this passage, the identification with another human being, in other words the sympathetic response, is interrupted by shutting out the signs of the other's suffering, and by a little reasonable argumentation. Reason, which for Rousseau comes with the formation of society, can stand in the way of the natural response that would move a person to moral action.

In sentimental fiction, sympathy is also a universal human capacity, although not all characters are alive to their sympathies because they have conditioned themselves against it. Moreover, the laws and customs of society fail to enforce moral behavior, and in some cases legislate immoral activities. When challenged, characters that act according to unjust laws or social customs justify themselves by saying that they are only doing what other reasonable (and lawful) people do. This is the case when Mr. Shelby of Uncle Tom's Cabin sells Tom and young Harry. While he regrets the sales Mr. Shelby feels entitled to go forward with them. In response to Mrs. Shelby's objections he says rather impatiently, "...I don't know why I am to be rated, as if I were a monster, for doing what every one does every day" (28). In this situation, Mr. Shelby judges the rightness of his actions by what the ideologies of commerce and property

ownership rather than by how he feels about taking Tom from his family and Harry from his mother, and as a result takes immoral action.

In St. Elmo Edna's lack of learning and contact with more sophisticated society preserves her ability to make moral judgments. At the start of the novel, Edna is an uneducated child living in an isolated home in the woods when she witnesses a duel. Afterwards, adults try to dispel her horror by explaining to her the custom of dueling. However, Edna's reaction only intensifies when she learns that the "murderer," as she insists on calling the winner of the duel, will likely go unpunished because dueling is "considered quite right and altogether proper" (4).

The problem that the sentimental novel poses is how can one make just decisions in the face of the accepted and even lawful corruption that marks the "world as it is." The sentimental novel not only comments on this states of affairs but also proposes a guide for recognizing injustice. Harriet Beecher Stowe, at the end of Uncle Tom's Cabin, articulates the role sympathy plays in making moral judgments and taking just action:

> But, what can any individual do? Of that, every individual can judge. There is one thing that every individual can do, -- they can see to it that *they feel right*. An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who *feels* strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race. See, then, to your sympathies in this matter! Are they in harmony with the

> sympathies of Christ? Or are they swayed and perverted by the sophistries of worldly policy? (385)

Stowe's ideas regarding sympathy – which are by-and-large shared by the authors of sentimental novels -- democratize justice. Everyone is entitled to sympathy, everyone can feel sympathy, and everyone can use sympathy to make judgments. Moreover, those who are the most immersed in "worldly polity," lawmakers and businessmen, are perhaps the least able to make just decisions. In others words, moral authority rests in the hands of those alive to sympathy rather than in those officially in power. And since women are more likely to have a more lively experience of sympathy, this concept of justice gives tremendous authority to women. Moreover, women's nineteenth-century social position of private citizen without an official political role actually legitimates rather than undermines their moral authority over "the great interests of humanity."

Characters alive to their feelings often do transcend the prejudices of their time or their social sphere. In some cases the consequences of this moral acuity is limited to the personal, as is the case in The Wide, Wide World. In other instances, characters are moved to take action in the public world, which is the case in Uncle Tom's Cabin. This is also true in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Hope Leslie. The racial and religious prejudice that characterizes puritan

Massachusetts fail to persuade Hope as she "took counsel only from her own heart" (120). For both Edna and Hope, the most basic religious instruction and their emotional sensitivity serve to guide their sense of justice.

On the other hand, one can be a godly creature and still lack moral discernment if one becomes estranged from one's own feelings. This is the case of Esther of Hope Leslie. Esther's uncle, Governor Winthrop, who heads the powerful puritan Massachusetts theocracy, professes, "passiveness, that, next to godliness, is a woman's best virtue" (153). In following her uncle's instructions, Esther has suppressed her own feelings to such a degree, "that uncontrolled emotion was as alarming, to compare small things to great, as if an obedient planet were to start from its appointed orbit" (275). Because she lacks independence of feeling, Esther has very little capacity for independent thought and action. She cannot examine her feelings and therefore cannot see the injustices carried out by her uncle, as Hope and Everell do. For Esther there is only duty and submission.

In giving a model for how to recognize injustice, the sentimental novel also provides a theory of why there is injustice to start with. A dearth of sympathy, especially in those who wield power over others, is the primary source of injustice in the sentimental novel. The sympathetic response in the

sentimental novel, as in moral philosophy, stands as an indicator that we exist in relation to one another, and the experience of sympathy signals that a debt is owed to another. When sympathy is inhibited or ignored, these debts go unheeded and injustice ensues. But how is this universal human capacity of sympathy overridden so that an individual or many individuals can act selfishly? In other words, how does the "world as it is" get that way? To answer that question, the sentimental novel concerns itself with the people who wield power and shape the "world as it is": Often this means men operating in the public spheres of commerce and politics. When one of these characters acts unjustly it is almost always because he has attached himself to an ideology that not only countenances self-service but is predicated upon it. Commerce and politics are both predicated on competition, a type of self-service. Moreover, the rhetoric of these ideologies occludes the harm that their practices do to others and/or obscures the humanity of those harmed. For instance, the cruelty and injustice of slavery is couched in terms of property rights in Uncle Tom's Cabin. The Puritans in Hope Leslie refer to the native peoples they murdered in their homes as wolves in a den. Thus, according to the sentimental novel, a dearth not only of sympathy but also virtue yields injustice.

Because those who have legal, political, and economic power are generally

men, whether they are fathers, property owners, bondsmen, legislators, or governors, the critiques made by sentimental novels make of the power structure at hand contain a critique of how men use power and of the discourses to which men attach themselves. The problems of the "world as it is" have to do with the injustices that result from a lack of both sympathy and of virtue. The virtues I have listed form an alternate set to those values that govern the masculine spheres of commerce and politics. Against competition, the struggle for power, the preservation of property and privilege, and the bonds of honor among men stands the primary sentimental virtue of self-sacrifice. That these values drive the public world necessitates a moral guide independent of the law or of custom. Sentimental novels hold up a set of virtues that are private and feminine with the idea that should these virtues rule in the masculine spheres as well as in the home, justice would prevail everywhere.

Sentimental discourse's theory of justice is fundamentally democratic, as one need not have a specialized education to acquire moral acuity. To make just decisions, one need only to be alive to one's sympathies. Another aspect of sympathy or moral feeling present in moral philosophy and in sentimental discourse is the idea that people have a natural appreciation for virtue, a capacity that increases in sensitivity along with one's own acquisition of virtue. Part of

the project of the sentimental novel is the cultivation of moral feeling in the reader, the main strategy being the display of various virtues.[7]

In addition to demonstrating a concern for the moral character of the readers, virtue is essential to sentimental discourse's conception of a just division of the fruits of civil society. Possessing virtue means one has a right to a home, freedom, and justice. Magawisca of Hope Leslie demonstrates a number of key virtues. She shows compassion for the Fletcher family and a tremendous capacity for self-sacrifice when she intercedes for Everell at the cost of most of one arm. Magawisca's people also demonstrate familial ties and domesticity in Magawisca's telling of the massacre. Similarly the loving portrait of Uncle Tom and his home life demonstrate deep familial connection and a piety that extends out into his community. These qualities are the basis for sentimental discourse's alternate version of citizenship. One need not be a man, own property, or be white to justly deserve the fruits of civil society but rather demonstrate virtue. The citizenship imagined by sentimental discourse, of course, does not include the vote, as that would be an overt entrance into political discourse and violation of the social contract between men and women based on the ideology of separate

[7] Jane Tompkins has pointed out that "The implantation of virtue was the primary goal of nearly everything nineteenth-century Americans read: textbooks, novels, poems magazine stories, or religious tracts" (157). Shaping the moral character of readers was a part of a nation-building project. The topic of virtue on display is one that I will take up more fully in the following chapter.

spheres. Instead, the focus is on the rights to domesticity, justice, and freedom from enslavement.

Part of the outrage underlying Our Nig arises from the fact that while Frado exhibits a number of the essential virtues of the sentimental heroine, piety, submission, self-sacrifice, and compassion, along with intelligence and a capacity for self-improvement, she is allowed to enjoy none of the rights that according to sentimental discourse are due her. Similarly, Zitkala-Sa's American Indian Stories demonstrate the deep familial ties of the narrator's community as well as a profound sense of home that includes the natural world. The stories are an appeal for the right to home and family based on the virtues privileged in sentimental discourse, and also comprise an expose of whites' disregard for the rights of native Americans by robbing them of their homes and dividing families by sending the children to faraway boarding schools. The collection of stories begins at the family's home, which is both represented by a wigwam, the path to the river and the river itself. Mother and daughter are performing a household duty, walking to the river to draw water for household use. Zitkala-Sa writes of her mother: "Often she was sad and silent, at which times her full arched lips were compressed into hard and bitter lines, and shadows fell under her black eyes" (7). When the young Zitkala-Sa begs to know "what made the years fall,"

her mother responds, "'Hush; my little daughter must never talk of my tears'; and smiling through them, she patted my head and said, "Now let me see how fast you can run today'.... I was as free as the wind that blew my hair, and no less spirited than a bounding deer. These were my mother's pride, -- my wild freedom and overflowing spirits. She taught me no fear save that of intruding myself upon others" (7-8).

In less than two pages, Zitkala-Sa establishes an alternative form of domesticity, the virtues of self-control and self-sacrifice that are essential to the domestic life of mother and daughter. At the start of American Indian Stories, Zitkala-Sa's family has already been defrauded of their original home, and the narrator will be tricked into going to a boarding school. Even when she does return home, the separation and education she receives alienate her from her mother. Unable to comfort her troubled daughter, Zitkala-Sa's mother tries to console her by handing her a Bible: "'Here, my child, are the white man's papers. Read a little from them'" (73). Instead of providing succor, she writes, "my enraged spirit felt more like burning the book, which afforded me no help, and was a perfect delusion to my mother" (Ibid). Even back at home she has longed for Zitkala-Sa is still unhappy thanks to an internal sense of homelessness brought on by trying to occupy two cultures at once.

Both Zitkala-Sa and Wilson also reveal with their works the limits that racism puts on sympathy. The white teachers at the boarding school try to reshape their pupils after the fashion of little white girls. The teacher respond to the Native-American students without the sympathy that would be afforded little white girls separated from families. Zitkala-Sa suffers terribly, crying herself to sleep on the first night, and not a soul comforts her. Frado's situation is even worse as she cannot even count on the full sympathies of her white mother, who calls her children "black devils" (16). Both books speak to the experience of being placed in the power of whites whose racism sets anyone of color outside the realm of sympathy.

Not all sentimental novels concern themselves with extending rights to members of society that enjoy so few, as native Americans and slaves. Others argue for the extension of autonomy for white women. Ruth Hall, St. Elmo, and The Lamplighter argue for the right of women to earn, to live independently, to live the life of an artist, and to be considered capable of genius. Even in the more conservative and private novel The Wide, Wide World, Ellen Montegomery struggles against her uncle and her sense of fidelity for the autonomy to live by her own principles. These characters demonstrate that increased autonomy does not result in a diminishment of their virtue.

Men and Injustice

A major obstacle inherent to sentimental discourse is the separateness of the masculine and feminine spheres and the devaluing of the latter sphere. Male characters in sentimental fiction very often trivialize the qualities that mark the feminine sphere, most especially feeling. They instead ally themselves with the rationality that distinguishes the masculine sphere. However, when male characters denigrate feeling and claim that it has no bearing on the masculine sphere, they do so in the defense of an act that the novel indicts as an injustice. Both men and women cry in sentimental novels, although women do so more readily than men. In general, women are more often more alive to sympathy. The fact that men are less ready to cry has implications since socially men have power over others. The idea that men are less emotional and less bodily, instead of an asset, is depicted as a drawback and even the source of much suffering on the part of others, including and even especially family members.

In fact, patriarchal power is the source of much affliction, and since the sentimental novel endorses the virtue of filial duty, fathers present a special problem. Within families, fathers in sentimental novels (and in the nineteenth century) typically have the final say in decision-making since they control the

family's purchasing power and property. Fathers and adopted fathers often use these powers, along with an insistence on filial obedience, to control and oppress family members. Mr. Graham of The Lamplighter revokes Gertrude's financial support in an attempt to force her to agree to accompany him on a trip abroad. Mr. Lindsay, the maternal uncle who adopts Ellen as a daughter in The Wide Wide World, extorts all manner of behavior from his niece – often repellent to her – in the name of filial love and duty. Ellen's own father is not so much manipulative as he is insensible to the needs of his wife and child. He refuses money to Mrs. Montgomery so that she may properly equip Ellen for life Aunt Fortune; and by compelling Mrs. Montgomery to leave Ellen asleep, he makes the parting of mother and daughter much more traumatic than necessary. Governor Winthrop, of Hope Leslie, is such an exacting and unfeeling patriarch that his niece, Esther Downing, becomes morose. The fathers in Charlotte Temple use a number of methods to compel their sons to marry women with money.

These oppressive patriarchs are depicted not as cruel and mean-spirited, but as men with sympathies too narrow and virtues woefully underdeveloped. Mr. Graham, for instance, is drawn as a good man (when doing good appeals to him), but without the understanding of self-sacrifice as it might apply to him:

> Mr. Graham was a liberal and highly respectable man; he had the reputation, as the world goes, of being a remarkably high-minded and honorable man; and not without reason, for his conduct had oftentimes justified this current report of him. But, alas! he was a *selfish* man, and often took very one-sided views. He had supported and educated Gertrude, -- he liked her, -- she was the person whom he preferred for a travelling companion for himself and Emily, -- nobody else had any claim upon her to compare with his, -- and he either *could* not or *would* not see that her duty lay in any other direction. (142)

Mr. Montgomery has none of the qualities exalted by the sentimental novel, The Wide, Wide World in particular. He shares not at all in his wife and daughter's tenderness and demonstrates no interest in domestic life. As a result, he is reduced to a kind of power-wielding cipher, who enters the action only to interrupt and ultimately separate mother and child. In fact, when Mr. Montgomery dies at sea, Ellen is practically unmoved, even relieved:

> Ellen rather felt that she was an orphan than that she had lost her father. She had never learned to love him, he had never given her much cause. Comparatively a small portion of her life had been passed in his society, and she looked back to it as the least agreeable of all; and it had not been possible for her to expect with pleasure his return to America and visit Thirwall; she dreaded it. Like had nothing now worse for her than a separation form Alice and John Humphreys; she feared her father might take her away and put her in some dreadful boarding school... (381)

Truly, the personal is political in the sentimental novel. Lack of sympathy, self-sacrifice, domesticity, and other virtues may cause a father to become an agent of affliction not only to family, but also, because of his

involvement in commerce and politics, to the world at large. Governor Winthrop, for instance, is an overtly political (and historical) figure, which Sedgwick makes into a private one as well in her historical romance of puritan times, Hope Leslie. The governor heads a powerful theocracy, and he brooks no opposition. When Everell Fletcher objects to Magawisca's imprisonment, Governor Winthrop chastises him: "it is somewhat bold in you to oppose the course of justice – to intermeddle with the public welfare – to life your feeble judgment against the wisdom of Providence" (234). He repeatedly insists that feeling must not be a factor in decision-making, as he does when confronted by Everell: "private feelings must yield to the public good" (234). As a spiritual leader, the governor also has the authority to interfere in private affairs, as he does when he recommends to Mr. Fletcher that despite their preference for one another, Hope and Everell should be guided to marry other people.

Sedgwick paints the governor with two brushes: The actions and words the author assigns to the governor are clearly oppressive and hypocritical, yet the narrator's tone is decorous and even forgiving. Of puritan men such as Governor Winthrop she writes:

> Whatever gratified the natural desires of the heart was questionable, and almost every thing that was difficult and painful, assumed the form of duty. As if the benevolent Father of all had stretched over our heads a canopy of clouds, instead of a bright firmament.... – But we would fix our eyes on the bright halo

> that encircled the pilgrims' head; and not mark the dust that sometimes sullied his garments. (156)

Similarly, Mr. Shelby of Uncle Tom's Cabin is depicted as a generally good man, but he initiates much affliction when he sells two of his slaves, Tom and young Harry. He has the legal power to own and sell slaves, and while he regrets the sales, he feels entitled to do so. In response to Mrs. Shelby's objections to her husband's actions, Mr. Shelby responds by telling his wife, "you allow yourself to feel too much," implying that feeling should never enter into business matters (62). Later in the novel, Senator Bird instructs his wife that law making and feeling are activities properly kept separate. When Mrs. Bird admonishes her husband for passing a law that forbids people from assisting fugitive slaves, Mr. Bird replies:

> But, Mary, just listen to me. Your feelings are all quite right, dear, and interesting, and I love you for them; but, then, dear, we mustn't suffer our feelings to run away with our judgment; you must consider it's not a matter of private feeling, -- there are great public interests involved, -- there is such a state of public agitation rising, that we must put aside our private feelings. (69)

These novels identify the source of both personal and institutional oppression as power wielded without the benefit of feeling and sympathy. If the virtues that the men in these novels celebrate in their wives were applied to the masculine spheres of commerce and public policy, the world would be a just place. In fact, of all the authors, Stowe underscores this point most powerfully by presenting a matriarchal utopia in Uncle Tom's Cabin. The solution is for men to take on the qualities of women, and for women to have more influence, to be taken seriously. Those men who act unjustly but love their wives and mothers and love domesticity, like Mr. Bird, are depicted as capable of rehabilitation.

However, another theme repeated throughout sentimental texts is that in order to feel sorrow for another, a person must also have felt sorrowed for her/himself. For instance, in The Lamplighter, when Mr. Amory sees that Gerty's eyes were "glistening with the dew of sympathy" for him, he tells her not to weep since she will surely have enough cares of her own (276). In her reply, Gerty voices a sentimental precept regarding sympathy: "'If I had not sorrows already…I should not know how to feel for others; if I had not often wept for myself, I should not weep now for you," (Ibid). That being the case, the men who have power and privilege and rarely encounter opposition or

oppression and are thus less likely to sympathize with others and tend toward egocentrism. Moreover, men tend to participate in activities that reward competition and even selfishness, like capitalism.

The men in sentimental novels also often set themselves up as superior in rationality to their wives and daughters. Like Mr. Shelby, they patronize their feeling wives, and contend that they rely on their reason. However, reason in the sentimental novel is depicted as slippery and used as justification for acting immorally or shirking proper duties. In sentimental literature, reason is also regarded as limited, or at least inferior to the emotional appeal. Mr. Bird is a reasonable person, and yet reason is not what ultimately convinces him of the injustice of fugitive laws.

The sentimental novel also models alternative versions of masculinity. Gerty's beloved, Willie Sullivan, is one such model.

> He did not, however, while arming himself for the future conflict with the world, forget the present, but sat down and learned his Sunday-school lessons. After which, according to custom, he read aloud in the Bible; and then Mrs. Sullivan, laying her hand on the head of her son, offered up a simple, heart-felt prayer for the boy, -- one of those mother's prayers, which the child listens to with reverence and love, and remembers in the far off years; one of those prayers which keep men from temptation, and deliver them from evil" (39).

Ideal masculinity, here, is out of necessity fitted for commercial activity but also

pious and informed by maternal guidance. Mr. Fletcher, of Hope Leslie, represents a positive version of fatherhood; he is tenderhearted, domesticity loving, and attentive to his children's desires and feelings.

Feeling Out of Bounds: Anger and Desire

While lively feeling is essential to sentimental discourse's theories of justice and sociability, not all feeling in the sentimental novel is viewed as positive. Anger is very rarely lovingly detailed or held up for emulation. In fact, angry and despairing tears are to be avoided. These are also tears that are often cried in the absence of sympathy. They speak of rebellion against the sufferer's situation, which is discouraged for a number of reasons, the foremost being that as dependents girls cannot afford to rebel. When anger appears it is almost always depicted negative and destructive.

In the sentimental *bildungsroman*, the central drama arises from the tension between adhering to virtue and giving into powerful "passions," such as grief, anger and sometimes desire.[8] Because of the heroine's position of relative

[8] Here I am referring to a subset of the sentimental novel as described by Nina Baym as "woman's fiction." They tell "the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustained her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world" (11). However, in the introduction to the second edition of Woman's Fiction, Baym explicitly rejects the term bildungsroman, as valuing too much "self expression over self-discipline" to be accurate for the works she includes under the rubric of woman's fiction (xix). I use it because woman's fiction is too broad a term to describe what I see

powerlessness, she is destined to encounter a great deal of opposition and even oppression just as she is forming an identity. She is counseled to create a self that can withstand many immovable obstacles to her own will, as well as deal with the rage and despair she feels at being so often frustrated. The repressive events define the heroine, her identity and also how she fits into her immediate world. The danger is that anger and grief could shape the heroine, making her unsociable and destructive, even beyond sympathy. And because she is a dependant, she must get along.

The path set before her is adherence to an "ethic of submission." Those things she cannot change she must learn to accept as the will of God. The alternative is typically represented as destructive to self and others, as well as a turning away from God. To give an example, when Ellen Montgomery, the heroine of Susan Warner's bildungsroman The Wide, Wide World, learns that her father has decided to leave Ellen behind when he takes her mother abroad for her health, she grieves quite heartily. In fact, her sadness threatens to destroy Ellen and even make her unholy, as she is said to give "way to a violent burst of grief that seemed for a few moments as if it would rend soul and body in twain" (11). In her move to quiet Ellen, Mrs. Montgomery directs her daughter to

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as a subset of sentimental fiction, and because bildingsroman refers to novel that has as its main theme the formative years or spiritual education of one person.

regard their separation as God's will, and therefore adjust the pitch of her grief: "'Ellen! Ellen! Listen to me,' she said; 'my child this is not right. Remember, my darling, who it is that brings this sorrow upon us; though we *must* sorrow, we must not rebel'" (12). Mrs. Montgomery's response to her child's grief also underlines its destructive potential and the necessity of self-control: "You will hurt both yourself and me, my daughter, if you cannot command yourself. Remember, dear Ellen, God sends no trouble upon his children but in love; and though we cannot see how, he will no doubt make all this work for our good'" (12).

Similarly, Gerty of The Lamplighter wrestles with her outrage at being badly abused by her harsh caretaker, Nan Grant. Initially Gertrude's fury is unmediated. When Nan kills her pet kitten Gerty hits her with a piece of firewood. Nan then shoves Gerty out into the street and washes her hands of her. While her anger is represented as legitimate, Gerty's loss of self-awareness is cast as dangerous:

> When Gerty was angry or grieved, she always cried aloud, -- not in sobbing, as many children do, but uttering a succession of piercing shrieks until she sometimes quite exhausted her strength. When she found herself in the street, she commenced screaming; -- not from fear at being turned away from her only home, and left all alone at nightfall to wander about the city, and perhaps freeze before morning (for it was very cold), -- she did not think of herself for a moment. (11)

The benefactors who take Gerty in worry not only about the state of her wrathful soul, but also about her diminished chances for success in life. After all, how will she get by in life if she continues to attack those who insult her (as she does at school) or seek revenge (later Gerty throws a rock through Nan Grants window)? They set about to "cure" Gerty of her "dark infirmity" which threatens one day to "write in fearful lines the mournful requiem of earthly joy" (63). Like Ellen Montgomery, Gerty is taught forgiveness and submission.

Unchecked anger presents another threat to the heroines of the sentimental *Bildungsroman*. Being an orphan, she depends on the kindness of the community at large; however, being wrathful might extinguish the sympathy others feel for her. Overtaken by rage, Gerty accidentally bumps into Mrs. Ellis on the street, whose response is to shake the child. Later, when Gerty has been comforted, the same woman treats her tenderly and can hardly believe that she is looking upon the same child who is now resting peacefully. Heroines in these novels receive much help and comfort from the community at large, not only because community members take pity upon her, but also because they see the virtue in her.

The advice to embrace an "ethic of submission" may have special relevance to nineteenth-century girls, but is not meant for them exclusively. As

the reader learns later, Gerty's father, Mr. Amory, regarded his own unfeeling and suspicious stepfather with an outrage that resulted in their alienation, and years of unhappy drifting for Gerty's father. Moreover, an act of pique on his part also indirectly caused Emily's blindness and seemed for a long time to have written "in fearful lines the mournful requiem of earthly joy." However, Mr. Amory was not destroyed as Gerty might have been by such an act. Having the latitude and opportunities of a man, in his drifting Mr. Amory lived the life of an adventurer who came home wealthy.

When one lives in purely hostile atmosphere, as do Frado and the narrator of American Indian Stories, anger has a different role to play. One day, when Mrs. Bellmont was about to administer her yet another beating, Frado grabs a stick, raises it over her head, and shouts, "'Stop!...strike me, and I'll never work a mite for you;' and throwing down what she had gathered, stood like one who feels the stirring of free and independent thoughts" (105). Similarly, Zitkala-Sa recalls that when she had learned some English and understood some of what was going on around her at the boarding school, "a mischievous spirit of revenge possessed me" (59). Taken to the kitchen to mash turnips, she

> ...stood upon a step, and, grasping the handle with both hands, I bent in hot rage over the turnips. I worked by vengeance upon them. All were so busily occupied that no one noticed me. I saw that the turnips were in a pulp, and that further beating could not improve them; but the order was, "Mash these turnips," and

> mash them I would! I renewed my energy; and as I felt a satisfying sensation that the weight of my body had gone into it. (60)

Later she is scolded, but she remains "triumphant in my revenge," and at dinner, "I whooped in my heart for having once asserted the rebellion within me" (61). For both Frado and Zitkala-Sa, expressing anger is a powerful actualization of an independent self and a rejection of oppression. The safe expression of anger is rare for them both but clearly important to their identities. Given the danger of their situations, no one needs to counsel them to keep their rage under wraps.

Like anger, desire is presented as a dangerous emotion for the heroines of sentimental novels. Shame is what keeps desire in check, and for this reason shame is regarded by the sentimental as indispensable to girls and women. It is no accident then that blushing in these texts signifies both shame and desire. When a beloved is mentioned or comes into a room, a blush often escapes onto the face of the female lover. In this moment, desire and embarrassment over the unbidden expression of that desire are simultaneous. Coming together like this, shame serves to contain desire. Those female characters that lack shame are capable of evil and deception. For instance, Madame La Rue of Charlotte Temple is described this way:

> ...when once a woman has stifled the sense of shame in her own bosom, when once she has lost sight of the basis on which reputation, honor, every thing that should be dear to the female heart, rests, she grows hardened in guilt, and will spare no

> pains to bring down innocence and beauty to the shocking level with herself: and this proceeds from that diabolical spirit of envy, which repines at seeing another in the full possession of that respect and esteem which she can no longer hope to enjoy" (32).

Mrs. Meredith, the scheming aristocratic mother of Jasper Meredith in The Linwoods exhibits a similar shamelessness, commented upon parenthetically: "(alas! for poor human nature! – the lady uttered this without a blush)" (305).

As this last passage suggests, according to sentimental discourse, moral feeling can be conditioned out of people, and very often is. Moreover, when characters act immorally they are engaging in a type of social activity that cultivates and even depends upon impaired moral faculties and numbed sympathies. Mrs. Linwood, for instance, has aristocratic sensibilities and is ambitious for her son to make a financially and socially advantageous match. Mrs. Linwood, while in America, is somewhat unusual in her pretensions; however, she is not unique as schemer and a plotter of intrigues. Sedgwick makes clear that Mrs. Linwood is participating in a behavior common to her social set.[9] The values of Mrs. Linwood and her peers have nothing to do with virtue and in fact to participate in the kind of social striving Mrs. Linwood engages in, one must set virtue and care for others aside.

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[9] With Mrs. Meredith and her son, Sedgwick exemplifies the sets of values and behaviors that are the worst that Europe has to over and the she would like see excluded from the national character of Americans.

In sentimental fiction, egoistic pursuits often occur in the context of social activity with its own ideology and even rhetoric. This is true of market capitalism, specifically of the slave trade in Uncle Tom's Cabin. The language of property law and of economic transaction serves to obliterate the humanity of slaves and the harm inflicted upon them. When Mrs. Shelby confronts her husband with how she feels about selling Tom and Harry away from home and family, Mr. Shelby invokes the rhetoric of commerce and claims that feeling has no place in business matters. Sentimental discourse insists that feeling in fact has an integral role to play in business activity. In fact, a moral, feeling person can be a perfectly fine business manager, as Mrs. Shelby demonstrates when her husband dies and the farm prospers under her direction.

Sentimental discourse not only critiques the discourses and social activities governed by egoism, but argues that inequality ensues because competition determines the division of social goods. Sentimental discourse recommends a different system for dividing social goods and conferring rights based on feminine virtue. How can the "world as it is" undergo such a fundamental change? One strategy employed by sentimental novels is to change the character of the nation by instilling virtue and an appreciation for a particular set of virtues. This approach accounts for one of the hallmarks of sentimental

fiction, placing virtue on display. Another approach is to revive the nation's dulled sympathies by making use of the pathetic, in other words, by placing virtue in distress. In this way, the discourse drives sentimental aesthetics. In the next chapter I discuss the aesthetic features of the sentimental novel and the spectacular strategies behind the pathetic appeal.

CHAPTER 2

NATURAL LANGUAGE, SENTIMENTAL AESTHETICS, AND THE NEW ORALITY

Sentimental fiction sets out to shape moral character, revive the sympathies, and mobilize a discourse posited as superior to other discursive forms, especially to those of commerce and politics, because it engages rather than disables the sympathies. Without sympathy, moral feeling, sociability, and justice are impossible. To more fully understand and contextualize sentimental aesthetics and understand their connections to early film, this chapter looks to rhetoric and elocution texts influential in nineteenth-century America. The same ideas about sympathy, emotional expression, moral feeling, and even the role of art that lay behind nineteenth-century rhetoric and elocution also fuel sentimental aesthetics, particularly conventions for emotional representation.

The highly conventional emotional display that is the hallmark of sentimental fiction is perhaps the element most alien to present-day readers of these novels, and it is certainly the aspect upon which early critics focused their scorn. How can such stylized and conventional representations of emotion have been effective in moving an audience? Fred Lewis Pattee, Helen Waite Papashvily, Ann Douglas, and Herbert Ross Brown concluded that readers of sentimental fiction lacked sophistication or were highly excitable to find such

inauthentic displays of feeling effective. While this sexist explanation has largely been set aside, the question of why feeling characters act the way they do in sentimental fiction remains largely unanswered. To address this question, I will presume that feeling itself needs contextualization, if it is to be legible, since ideas about feeling, its experience and expression, as well as expectations about its representation are culturally and historically variable.

As I showed in the last chapter, nineteenth-century American sentimental discourse draws deeply on moral sense philosophy, particularly for its ideas on sympathy, sociability, and justice. Moral sense philosophy had influence upon American culture beyond the sentimental novel, and in fact the sentimental novel fits into a larger cultural interest in feeling, its representation and power to persuade. Ideas developed by the moral sense philosophers and by rhetoricians interested in reforming the teaching and practice of oratory took hold in America. In the nineteenth century the primary goal of the orator shifted away from convincing an audience through argumentation; the orator instead sought to move the audience. In fact the very notion of eloquence came to be defined as a speaker's ability to arouse emotion. To achieve this end, the teaching of oratory in America began to include a great deal of instruction in emotionally affecting delivery.

The main thrust of sentimental aesthetics is turning what is thought to be an internal matter, feeling, into an external, even spectacular display. To do this, the feeling character engages a physical lexicon of emotion to signify particular emotional states. Nineteenth-century orators also used emotional display as a persuasive technique, and the physical lexicon they drew upon is remarkably similar. To look at elocution and rhetoric texts popular in nineteenth-century America is to shed light on the strategies behind the emotional appeal so central to American sentimental fiction. Moreover, this approach reveals that the sentimental novel and nineteenth-century elocution and rhetoric share ideological and aesthetic precepts as well as a number of idealistic projects. Elocution and rhetoric texts make explicit what is so often implicit in sentimental fiction, namely the theories and ideology behind the aesthetics of feeling central to sentimental fiction. Putting sentimental texts alongside rhetoric manuals, a coherent system for the signification and representation of emotion emerges, as does the impression that the fiction and the instruction manuals inform one another.

The New Orality

Since elocution and rhetoric are currently somewhat esoteric or at least purely academic studies, it is hard to imagine just how popular the study of

oration was in nineteenth-century America. While oratory is now limited to high-school debate teams, rotary clubs, and politicians, it was once the enthusiasm of nearly everyone. As literary historian Janet Gabler-Hover remarks:

> The love of rhetorical study from the end of the eighteenth century into the final decades of the nineteenth century engrossed Americans of all sorts, those people intellectually and philosophically inclined but also those literate and perhaps not so literate within the popular culture. Training in rhetoric began in America with the establishment of universities and private preparatory schools at the end of the eighteenth century and was soon a part of the curriculum in public schools. Essays on rhetoric, or oratory, practically interchangeable terms during this time, also appeared frequently within the pages of American periodicals, and the terms of rhetorical idealism derived from the rhetorical study of the time could be heard in the speeches and in the written praise of the orators who for many Americans practically became folk heroes. As one scholar of nineteenth-century oratory explains, "Nineteenth-century Americans displayed an enthusiasms for 'eloquence' and 'oratory' which is difficult for the modern reader fully to appreciate. Young men who aspired to leadership in any field were counseled that the cultivation of eloquence was the surest, speediest avenue to success."(35)

Evidence of the popularity of elocution literature is available in many libraries, where one can still find volume after volume of elocution instruction, some intended as school textbooks and others for use in the home. The popular manuals generally provide some abbreviated form of elocution instruction, complete with illustrations of oratorical poses, gestures, and facial expressions, which are then followed by an anthology of material for the student to practice

or the private enthusiast to entertain family and friends. Rare book dealers will tell you that such volumes were printed in numbers so great that they remain nearly ubiquitous and are therefore of little value. Still other texts were designed for professionals, especially the clergy. Actors had dual careers as professional readers, and many schools of elocution were geared toward training actors.

What makes nineteenth-century elocution and rhetoric relevant to sentimental fiction is its emphasis on the persuasive power of the emotional appeal, especially the appeal made by the physical manifestation of passion. As Jay Fliegelman argues in Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, & the Culture of Performance, public speaking, specifically political speech, underwent a change in the eighteenth century so as to more effectively address the new nation's democratic audience of all classes. Defining the "new rhetoric" was a movement away from the stylized, classical rhetoric practiced by elites and toward a "natural" speaking style geared to move a common audience. In place of the idea of "rhetoric as stylistic ornaments, as Aristotelian topics, and as topically generated arguments in the service of proving or disproving a point against opposition," the new rhetoricians,

> favored a purified rhetoric of persuasion broadly understood as the active art of moving and influencing the passions. Crucial to this definition was the elevation of the performative aspect of speech over the argumentative. Tonal and gestural delivery, which in

> classical rhetoric had been the minor element of *pronunciatio*, was given a new position of centrality. If in classical rhetoric *elocutio* meant style, the choice and arrangement of words, by the mid eighteenth century it signified oral delivery. (30)

Thus, persuasion was elevated to the primary goal of oration and delivery was thought to outstrip content as a persuasive device. As a result, many texts on rhetoric and elocution popular at the time gave a great deal of instruction on how to physically convey particular emotional states. In this way, the speaker's emotional investment in his topic would translate to the audience, and hopefully inspire like emotions.

The reasons that gesture, vocal tone, and facial expression were thought to have the greatest persuasive effect have in part to do with primitivist arguments about the evolution of language. The new rhetoric's concept of persuasion also depends greatly upon ideas that Adam Smith and other moral sense philosophers forwarded about sympathy and its specular nature – ideas also central to the sentimental novel. And yet, Adam Smith, the philosopher who theorized so extensively about the relationship between spectacle and sympathy, put little faith in the power of simply witnessing a person in a passion to provoke sympathy and more in knowing what was causing the distress. In fact, he wrote: "Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it" (6). He also rejects the idea that extreme expressions of distress actually result in greater sympathy, but rather the

opposite: "We are disgusted with that clamorous grief, which, without delicacy, calls upon our compassion with sighs and tears, and importunate lamentations" (24). According to Smith, the more the distressed person fights for mastery of his/her emotions, the greater are the rewards of sympathy.

Two of Smith's colleagues whose work figured prominently in the rhetorical revolution in America, Lord Kames and Hugh Blair, had greater faith in the power of an emotional display to rouse the emotions of a witness, audience, or reader.[1] Both rhetoricians helped popularize the idea that the successful public speaker performs his emotions. I say *popularize* because their works, especially Blair's, were almost ubiquitous through the nineteenth century. Lord Kames' Elements of Criticism (1762) went through at least thirty-one American editions, the first in 1796 and the last in 1883. Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (1783) went through fifty-three editions, fourteen of them after 1835. By the first decade of the nineteenth century many colleges included rhetoric in their curriculum and used Blair's Rhetoric as the standard text, and many abridged editions were printed in small towns, most likely for use in local schools.[2]

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[1] Kames and Smith, along with David Hume and Adam Ferguson formed the Poker Club, which later became the Select Society. Smith regarded Kames as the master of literary matters, and Smith also provided many ideas for Blair's book. William Chavat's The Origins of American Critical Thought, 1810-1835. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936, p. 33.

[2] Ibid., p. 30-31.

Both Blair and Kames emphasize persuasion and the role the passions play in persuasion. In fact, Blair makes a distinction between conviction and persuasion that hinges upon emotion: "It is the business of the philosopher to convince me of the truth; it is the business of the orator to persuade me to act agreeably to it, by engaging my affections on its side" (262). In fact, for a speaker to raise the emotions of his audience, he must himself be speaking out of passion:

> Almost any man, in a passion, is eloquent. Then he is at no loss for words and arguments. He transmits to others, by a sort of contagious sympathy, the warm sentiments which he feels; his looks and gestures are all persuasive, and nature here shows herself infinitely more powerful than art. (264)

A number of ideas are noteworthy in the above passage. First of all, being persuaded is nearly synonymous with the sympathetic response. Second, what arouses the sympathies/persuades the audience is primarily the emotion that is registered in "looks and gestures," which Blair characterizes as nature manifest. Finally, Blair underscores the force of an emotional presentation by saying that the passionate speaker "transmits" his feelings "by a sort of contagious sympathy."

Regarding the role of sympathy in the act of persuasion, Blair is fairly explicit: "Sympathy is a very powerful and extensive principle in our nature, disposing us to enter into every feeling and passion, which we behold expressed

by others…"(189). He also describes the state of being persuaded as sharing in the speaker's feelings, which is to be in sympathy with the speaker:

> …we are not only convinced, but we are interested, agitated, and carried along with the speaker, our passions are made to rise together with his; we enter into all his emotions; we love, we detest, we resent, according as he inspires us, and are prompted to resolve, or to act, with vigor and warmth. (263)

To provoke an audience's sympathy, for Blair, is to achieve the "highest degree of eloquence" (263).

Although Blair defines eloquence as "the art of persuasion," what he finds most persuasive is not art but nature (262). Nature for Blair is both the actual passion that the speaker feels when he has a great stake in his topic and the gestures and looks that convey that passion to the audience. Here Blair is referencing the idea that in the evolution of language, gesture and facial expression preceded words and are therefore more readily understood and more universal than spoken language, which is geographically specific. Fundamental to the new orality is also the idea that natural language is based on better insights into human nature than what classical rhetoric has to offer.

Like a number of other rhetoricians influential during the nineteenth century, Kames contends that the external signs of emotion constitute a "universal language, which no distance of place, no difference of tribe, no diversity of tongue, can darken or render doubtful…" (208). To witness these

signs is invariably to be moved: "None of these signs are beheld with indifference: they are productive of various emotions, tending all of them to ends good and wise" (209). In fact, Kames argues that every emotion has a corresponding physical manifestation: "So intimately connected are the soul and the body, that every agitation in the former produces a visible effect upon the latter" (204). Kames considers the physical signs of emotion a "natural language" because they expresses "to all beholders emotions and passions as they arise in the heart" (204).

While Kames regarded the external signs of emotion as natural, he counsels that public speakers and dramatic writers should study these signs so that they can replicate them more effectively: According to Kames, the artist

> ought to be well acquainted with this natural language of passion: the chief talent of such a writer is a ready command of the expressions that nature dictates to every person, when any vivid emotion struggles for utterance; and the chief talent of a fine reader is a ready command of tones suited to these expressions" (205).

To assist in learning the signs, Kames helpfully catalogues them in Elements of Criticism. The physical signs follow the general rule that emotion either elevates or depresses the mind, and the body follows suit (206):

Table 1. Kames' physical attitudes and gestures.

Emotion	Physical attitudes or gestures
Excessive joy	leaping, dancing, elevation of the body
Excessive grief	sinking body
Profound veneration	prostration, kneeling
Pride, magnamity, courage	erect posture
Humility	hanging the head
Arrogance	elevation of the head
Langor, despondence	reclining of head to one side

In his discussions and descriptions of the passions, Kames distinguishes between very powerful or violent emotions and the milder passions. The expressions of strong and sudden emotions he considers involuntary, while moderate feelings are expressed voluntarily and can be suppressed. In fact, Kames asserts that the "expressions are difficult to suppress while in a passion, but it is the better part of breeding to do so" (206). As a result, Kames contends

that the milder, happier passions tend to have less distinct signs, while the immoderate or excessive emotions are unmistakable. The expression of the involuntary passions is mute, reducing its signification to the physical and to pure spectacle. The excessive passions according to Kames, so agitate the mind that that the faculties of speech are impaired. When passions of these types fade a bit, they become loquacious as the mind struggles to disburden itself and find consolation (236). While Kames allows for variations in the signs of emotions, the results of degree (voluntary vs. involuntary), attempts at suppression and even physical constitution, he maintains that the "natural signs of emotions, voluntary and involuntary, being nearly the same in all men, form a natural language"(208) that is understood by all, even children (205). In fact, Kames claims that "the words that denote our passions, next to those that denote external objects, have the most distinct meaning" (209).

Kames regards the "external signs of passion" as serving a number of important moral and social purposes (211). The signs of passion, being so clear, reduce ambiguity in communication. One can also base character judgments on the signs of passion: "Looks and gestures give direct access to the heart," taking note of these signs allows one to choose, "with tolerable accuracy, the persons who are worthy of our confidence" (212). Social intercourse and affections are

rendered more lively thanks to infectious quality of the signs of the pleasant and virtuous emotions:

> When the countenance, the tones, the gestures, the action, join with the words in communicating emotions, these united have a force irresistible. Thus all the pleasant emotions of the human heart, with all the social and virtuous affections, are, by means of these external signs, not only perceived, but felt. (212)

Fortunately the reverse is true of the external signs of what Kames calls the "dissocial passions," like anger and revenge that are "hurtful by prompting violence and mischief," and instead of sharing in these emotions the spectator feels fear and repulsion (212-13). In other words, Kames believes, as do his colleagues in the moral sense school, that people are naturally attracted to the virtuous and repelled by the wicked. Finally, the external signs of distress and affliction serve special social and moral purposes since they inspire sympathy, "a passion to which human society is indebted for its greatest blessing, that of providing relief for the distressed" (213).

Kames and Blair both define taste in terms of liveliness of sympathy, an acute appreciation for the moral, and a deep disgust for the "wrong and improper," to use Kames' words (15). They also agree that the primary role of art is the exercise of the social affections and the invigorating of the sympathies, because they presume that witnessing virtuous acts, whether real or represented in art, is a kind of exercising of the sympathies. Moreover, because Kames

regards the feeling of sympathy for acts of virtue as producing a desire to imitate the actor, witnessing virtue is next door to being virtuous. Kames in fact characterizes the sympathizing with virtue as a mental exercise in virtue, and claims that "every exercise of virtue, internal and external, leads to habit; for a disposition or propensity of the mind, like a limb of the body, becomes stronger by exercise" (40). The result of reading "histories of generous and disinterested action," among other activities, is the constant exercise of the sympathies, "which by degrees introduces habit, and confirms, the authority of virtue: with respect to education in particular, what a spacious and commodious avenue to the heart of a young person is here opened!" (42-43). In fact, a reader may have the same healthful experience reading fiction, "because passions, as all the world know, are moved by fiction as well as by truth" (51). For Blair, the shaping of the young through reading is of national interest:

> For any kind of writing, how trifling soever in appearance, that obtains a general currency, and especially that early preoccupies the imagination of the youth of both sexes, must demand particular attention. Its influence is likely to be considerable, both on the morals and taste of a nation. (417)

And what Blair calls "fictitious histories" he considers the best vehicles for this national project (417).

The idea that "every emotion of the mind naturally has its own countenance, sound, and gesture" was not unique to Kames (204) and in fact

shaped how elocution was taught in America and England in the nineteenth century. James Burgh, another English source of American elocution, wrote the hugely influential book The Art of Speaking (1762). He holds that, "Nature has given to every emotion of the mind its proper outward expression" (12). He also provides detailed descriptions of "the principle passions, humours, sentiments, and intentions, which are to be expressed by speech and action" with the "hope that it will be allowed by the reader, that it is nearly in the following manner, that nature expresses them" (14). His descriptions are vastly more detailed than Kames', as witnessed by the following:

> Perplexity, or anxiety, which is always attended with some degree of fear and uneasiness, draws all the parts of the body together; gathers up the arms upon the breast; casts down the eyes, shuts and pinches the eyelids close; shuts the mouth, and pinches the lips close, or bits them. Suddenly the whole body is vehemently agitated. The person walks about busily, stops abruptly. He talks to himself, or makes grimaces. (Burgh 16)

The currency The Art of Speaking had in England and America is difficult to overstate:

> Burgh's conception and intensive analysis of these ideas were given circulation in at least seven British editions and eight American reprintings of his work. He was read by [Thomas] Sheridan, paraphrased by [John] Walker, anthologized by [William] Scott, pirated by an American publisher, quoted by [Gilbert] Austin, and recalled in one way or another by elocutionists for over a century. (Haberman 115)

Walker, who wrote many teaching manuals on elocution, provided a systematic theory of elocution in his Elements of Elocution (1777), a popular college textbook in America even after English dominance in elocution instruction passed on to American teachers (Robb 179). His detailed descriptions of the passions are indeed paraphrased from Burgh. For instance, Burgh describes of raillery this way: "*Raillery*, in sport, without real *animosity*, puts on the *aspect* of *cheerfulness*. The tone of *voice* is *sprightly*" (15). Now here is Walker: "Raillery, without animosity, puts on the aspect of cheerfulness; the countenance is smiling, and the tone of voice sprightly" (319).

Another English work that had lasting influence on elocution, especially in America, was Austin's Chironomia (1806). Austin wrote Chironomia because he felt that the fifth element of classical rhetoric, gesture and bodily action, had been neglected, and as a result public speaking in Britain, be it at the bar or in the pulpit, had become unforgivably boring. In Chironomia Austin devised a "notational scheme he hoped not only to facilitate the training of speakers and actors, but also to make possible the preservation of patterns of delivery" (iv Introduction to 1966 reprint, Robb and Thonssen). In the front of his text is a series of steel engravings depicting speakers holding positions within an imaginary sphere, and near them are notations indicating changes of position and arm movements. These steel engravings were reprinted in elocution

manuals again and again, with and without credit to Austin. One of the more popular American elocution texts, Practical Treatise on Gesture, by Jonathan Barber, was largely abstracted from Austin's Chironomia.[3] Until Steele MacKaye brought back from Paris the teachings of Francois Delsarte in 1871, Austin was the reigning authority in America on the teaching of gesture (Robb and Thonssen intro to 1966 reprint xvii).

Because the elocution textbooks that offered instruction in gesture, facial expression, and vocal tone borrow for one another, echo each other's descriptions of the passions, and reprint the same drawings (this was especially true of the popular manuals designed for the home), a coherent physical lexicon of emotion emerges. The sentimental novel uses this lexicon of emotional expression, thereby solidifying it further. Moreover, the sentimental novel shares in the philosophical, political, and moral goals that Blair and Kames have for artistic expression.

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[3] Barber taught rhetoric at Harvard as Edward T. Channing's assistant and actually constructed the sphere depicted in Austin's illustrations. Barber's methods were apparently unpopular with his students; one morning he found his bamboo sphere at the top of a barber's pole. Mary Margaret Robb and Lester Thonssen, introduction, Chironomia, by Gilbert Austin (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1966) xvii.

Natural Language and Sentimental Fiction

The influence of natural expression on nineteenth-century American sentimental literature is evident when novels of this period are placed side-by-side with the eighteenth-century British versions. Emily of Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho, Richardson's Clarissa, and Gothe's Werther certainly suffer and emote; however, the occasions of their feelings are more often related as fact rather than depicted and dwelled upon imagistically. With the help of natural language, American sentimental novels take feeling to the level of spectacle.

Harriet Beecher Stowe is the author upon whom the new rhetoric and ideas of natural language perhaps have the most verifiable direct influence. Stowe recalls learning about Blair.[4] She also uses the term "natural language" in Uncle Tom's Cabin. This occurs when George Harris' jealous and vindictive master puts him to drudge work, and he tries to disguise his feelings with only partial success:

> He had been able to repress every disrespectful word; but the flashing eye, the gloomy and troubled brow, were part of a natural language that could not be repressed, -- indubitable signs, which showed too plainly that the man could not become a thing. (11)

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[4] In The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher, Stowe recalls in the chapter she authored, "Early Remembrances" listening "with eager ears to historical criticisms and discussions, or to recitations in such works as Paley's 'Moral Philosophy,' Blair's 'Rhetoric,' and Alsion 'On Taste,' all full of most awakening suggestions to my thought" (535). Quoted in Gregg Camfield's article "The Moral Aesthetics of Sentimentality: A Missing Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Not only does Stowe use the term "natural language," her depiction of George's anger resembles Burgh's depiction of anger from the Art of Speaking:

> Anger, (violent) or rage, expresses itself with rapidity, interruption, noise, harshness, and trepidation. The neck stretched out; the head forward, often nodding and shaken in a menacing manner, against the object of the passion. The eyes red, inflamed, flaring, rolling, and sparkling; the eyebrows drawn down over them, and the forehead wrinkled into clouds. (24)

George cannot give vent to his anger, so there is no menacing nodding of the head toward his master or harsh sounds. What remains despite George's attempts at suppression are the signs produced by the eye and the brow. That George is unable to fully repress the expression of his anger accords with one of the precepts of natural language theory; emotions felt with great intensity are involuntarily expressed. As I have mentioned, Kames maintains that one can "repress" the signs of moderate feeling, and one generally ought to if he/she is to be considered polite. However, the signs of emotions like terror or surprise, or really any emotion felt with enough intensity, are irrepressible.

Also of note in this passage is Stowe's rhetorical use of natural language. That George Harris is unable to extinguish the signs of his feelings also signifies his humanity and the injustice of treating him as a thing, a piece of property. A motif common to sentimental fiction, and one that Stowe makes extensive use of in her argument against slavery, is the linkage between feeling and humanity.

One of the outrages of slavery that Stowe depicts is how slavers force the enslaved to misrepresent their feelings:

> The dealers in the human article make scrupulous and systematic efforts to promote noisy mirth among them, as a means of drowning reflection, and rendering them insensible to their condition. The whole object of the training to which the negro is put, from the time he is sold in the northern market till he arrives south, is systematically directed towards making him callous, unthinking, and brutal. The slave-dealer collects his gang in Virginia or Kentucky, and drives them to some convenient, healthy place, -- often a watering place, -- to be fattened. Here they are fed full daily; and, because some incline to pine, a fiddle is kept commonly going among them, and they are made to dance daily; and he who refuses to be merry - in whose soul thoughts of wife, or child, or home, are too strong for him to be gay - is marked as sullen and dangerous, and subjected to all the evils which the ill will of an utterly irresponsible and hardened man can inflict upon him. Briskness, alertness, and cheerfulness of appearance, especially before observers, are constantly enforced upon them, both by the hope of thereby getting a good master, and the fear of all that the driver may bring upon them, if they prove unsalable. (283-84)

The systematic training that Stowe describes estranges the enslaved people from their feelings, the result of which is the robbing of their humanity. The men who deal in slaves Stowe portrays as necessarily "hardened" to be able to engage in such heartless activities; however, forcing slaves to look and act cheerful is not just a strategy for ensuring salable slaves. The slavers are also protecting themselves from the signs of the slaves' suffering. Should they be allowed to express their despair, as witnesses the slavers might experience an appeal to their sympathies and have a crisis on conscience.

In this passage Stowe also undermines the evidence of the contentedness of slaves traditionally given by proponents of the slavery, singing. Even Simon Legree, who seems particularly insensible to the suffering he inflicts, a trait he boasts of, insists that his slaves sing jolly songs. After having bought Tom and Emmeline at auction, on the doleful way home, along "the wild forsaken road, now winding though dreary pine barrens, where the wind whispered mournfully," past the "long wreaths of black moss," Legree appears "well pleased" (296-97). Although Legree seems immune to the sad atmosphere around him and the dejected expressions of Tom and Emmeline, Stowe indicates that he must work to preserve the numb state of his sensibilities. Legree rides, "occasionally pulling away at a flask of spirit," and also insisting upon song from the slaves in the wagon. When Tom starts a hymn, Legree curses him and demands something "rowdy," and to be quick about it. Later, when Cassy acts the avenging ghost, Stowe makes clear that Legree's drinking and carousing served to keep sympathies and conscience at bay, and when confronted with the what appeared to be the supernatural, Legree works all the harder actually drinking himself to death. Stowe's argument is that those who engage in slave owning and selling *must* harden themselves, and hope for gain must "overcome frail human nature" that is susceptible to the signs of suffering among "the

helpless and unprotected" (7). Thus part of slave trading is suppressing or extinguishing the signs of suffering.

Cassy's behavior, which is often very strange and extreme, can also be explained in terms of natural language. Cassy has experienced the vicissitudes of slavery, including sexual exploitation; however, she maintains a proud aspect that Legree and others find intimidating but that does not completely cover the signs of her other profound feelings:

> There was a fierce pride and defiance in every line of her face, in every curve of the flexible lip, in every motion of her body; but in her eye was a deep, settled night of anguish, -- an expression so hopeless and unchanging as to contrast fearfully with the scorn and pride expressed by her whole demeanor. (305)

Present in this passage is the idea that Cassy both feels pride and also deliberately performs that pride. At other times, however, Cassy is felled by the mental anguish referred to in this passage. During these moments of "frenzied fit," (319) Cassy falls to the floor and "like one crushed and writhing under the extremity of mental anguish" groans and sobs aloud with "convulsive violence" (313). These emotional signifiers express a particular state of mind: Despair. Here is a description of despair from Burgh that illuminates Cassy's dramatic behavior:

> Despair, as in a condemned criminal, or one who has lost all hope of salvation, bends the eyebrows downwards; clouds the forehead; rolls the eyes around frightfully; opens the mouth toward the ears;

> bites the lips; widens the nostrils; gnashed the teeth, like a fierce wild beast. The heart is too much hardened to suffer tears to flow; yet the eyeballs will be red and inflamed like those of an animal in a rabid state. The head is hung down upon the breast. The arms are bended at the elbows; and the whole body is strained and violently agitated; groans, expressive of inward torture, more frequently uttered than words. If any word, they are few, and expressed with a sullen, eager bitterness; the tone of voice is loud and furious. As it often drives people to distraction, and self murder, it can hardly be over-acted by one, who would represent it. (17).

Cassy is most certainly represented as driven to distraction, a state expressed with her eyes by the appearance of an "insane light," and also vocally in a "wild, long laugh" (319). The source of Cassy's despair is her conviction that she is a lost soul. In response to her bitter experiences she fears that she has become too hardened and sinful to have hope of redemption, and she regards her continued suffering and the sufferings of those around her as evidence of God's desertion and her damnation. Here she speaks of her irreligious state:

> "I used to see the picture of him, over the altar, when I was a girl," said Cassy, her dark eyes fixing themselves in an expression of mournful reverie; "but, *he isn't here*! There's nothing here, but sin and long, long despair! O!" She laid her hand on her breast and drew in her breath, as if to lift a heavy weight. (319)

When Cassy throws her body on the ground, as she does on more than one occasion, she is letting go of her pride, which functions as an imperious shield against the mistreatment of Legree and his henchmen, and gives in to remorse. Burgh describes the physical attitude of extreme remorse as bodily prostration

(18). But Cassy, since she is convinced God will show her no mercy, finds no relief in penitence. She does not look heavenward for forgiveness but writhes, prostrated by unrelieved anguish.

Stowe is not the sole author of sentimental fiction whose aesthetics draw heavily upon theories of natural language. In fact, resemblances between elocutionary prescriptions for the representation of particular feelings and representations of feeling in sentimental fiction are widespread. For the sake of comparison, here are two influential rhetoricians, Walker and Burgh, on varieties of grief or sorrow:

> Grief, sudden and violent, expresses itself by beating the head; groveling on the ground; tearing of garment, hair and flesh; screaming aloud, weeping, stamping with the feet, lifting the eyes, from time to time, to heaven; hurrying to and from, running distracted, or fainting away, sometimes without recovery. Sometimes violent grief produces a torpid sullen silence, resembling total apathy. (Burgh 16)
>
> But when this passion [sorrow] is in excess, it distorts the countenance, as if in agonies of pain; it raises the voice to the loudest complainings, and sometimes even to cries and shrieks; it wrings the hands, beats the head and breast, tears the hair, and throws itself on the ground; and, like other passions, in excess, seems to border on frenzy (Walker 336).

From Charlotte Temple, here is the grief-stricken response of Mrs. Eldridge upon seeing her mortally wounded son. I should note that the family only the night before learned that it was financially ruined, thanks to the machinations of the son's friend, and Mr. Eldridge was taken to prison. Lucy

Eldridge [who will become Charlotte's mother], attends her brother as he is brought into the house on a litter:

> Her poor mother, weakened by illness and the struggles of the proceeding night, was not able to support this shock; gasping for breath, her looks wild and haggard, she reached the apartment where they had carried her dying son. She knelt by the bed side; and taking his cold hand, 'my poor boy,' said she, 'I will not be parted from thee: husband! son! Both at once lost. Father of mercies, spare me!' She fell into a strong convulsion, and expired in about two hours. (19)

Lucy Temple later responds with shrieks when she learns that her daughter Charlotte has left school and taken up with her lover. This shrieking, fainting response to grief is not unique to the characters of Charlotte Temple, but is rather an emotional trope found throughout sentimental fiction. Mothers separated from their children fall into fits, followed by dejection and sometimes death.

Male characters are more often shown to suffer the stupor-like version of intense sorrow. In this passage, Mr. Eldridge has learned that Charlotte has fled with her lover, Montraville, and is on his way home to tell Charlotte's mother and father:

> The old man returned to the chaise, but the light step and chearful countenance were no more; sorrow filled his heart, and guided his motions; he seated himself in the chaise, his venerable head reclined upon his bosom, his hands were folded, his eye fixed on vacancy, and the large drops of sorrow rolled silently down his cheeks (51).

Notice that in this passage the heart or the emotions guide the sufferer's motions, an idea central to theories of natural language.

However, female characters also experience this quiet version of grief. In The Wide Wide World Ellen accidentally learns that her mother has died abroad, and like Mr. Eldridge, she experiences her supreme sorrow as a stupor:

> Ellen reached her arms, and strength and spirit seemed to fail there. Alice thought she had fainted; she laid her on the sofa, called Margery, and tried the usual things, weeping bitterly herself as she did so. It was not fainting however: Ellen's senses soon came back; but she seemed like a person stunned with a great blow, and Alice wished grief had had any other effect upon her. It lasted for days. A kind of stupor hung over her; tears did not come; the violent strain of every nerve and feeling seemed to have left her benumbed. She would sleep long heavy sleeps the greater part of the time, and seemed to have no power to do any thing else. (346-347)

Ellen revives a bit, but is weighed down by her grief: "Her interest in every thing seemed to be gone. Books had lost their charm. Walks and drives and staying at home were all one, except indeed that she rather liked best the latter. Appetite failed her; her cheek grew colourless..." (347). The way Ellen continues in this grieved state meets with Burgh's description of "Melancholy, or fixed grief" as "gloomy sedentary, motionless" and marked by a "total inattention to every thing that passes" (16). Sorrow is commonly represented in sentimental fiction this way. Melancholy for Emily of The Lamplighter sets in upon the loss of her beloved, and is the blight of her youth and health.

Natural language: The Non-Rhetorical Rhetoric

Beyond sharing a system of signs for the representation of feeling, sentimental fiction and the rhetorical theory have in common a number of idealistic goals. By communicating through natural expression, orators and authors of sentimental fiction were engaging in what they hoped was a superior form of communication, one of greater efficacy and authenticity than other types of discourse. By using the "non-rhetorical rhetoric of natural language" instead of making use of rational argumentation, orators hoped to circumvent "rancorous political debate" through a direct appeal to the heart (Fliegelman 49-50). The truthfulness of such an appeal was thought to be verifiable in a way that rational argumentation (and most certainly the highly stylized rhetorical forms of classical rhetoric) was not. The passion of the orator and the like feelings he provoked in his listeners/spectators was evidence of the truthfulness of the orator and even the rightness of his position.

The truly utopian ends of natural language in both elocution and literature were to engage in a type of communication that revealed rather than occluded the humanity of the speaker and the subjects of his speech, and thereby underscore rather than muddy the duties people have to one another. Finally, for both Blair and Kames true art is bound up in the moral, and the development

of taste is synonymous with moral improvement. Exposure to worthy artistic production intensifies one's sensibility to the pleasures of virtue and the disgust brought on by vice. These sensibilities are otherwise known as the moral sentiments. The cultivation of taste, at for least Kames, is of national interest. People of taste make better citizens because they are moral, can make proper moral judgments regarding their fellow citizens, and assess the sincerity of their leaders and hence the rightness of the laws they propose. This concern for the moral character of the nation and for developing a discourse that could clarify rather than cloud human relationships was certainly one shared by authors of sentimental fiction.

Uncle Tom's Cabin plays out the conflict between political discourse and the moral sentiments brought on by a scene of suffering. Mr. Bird is a state senator who has defended the practice of slavery and been active in passing laws against assisting escaped slaves. However, he actually breaks this law when confronted with Eliza and Harry, a mother and child newly escaped from a slave state:

> He was as bold as a lion about it [fugitive laws], and "mightily convinced" not only of himself, but everybody that heard him; -- but then his idea of a fugitive was only an idea of the letters that spell out the word, -- or, at the most, the image of a little newspaper picture of a man with a stick and bundle, with "Ran way from the subscriber" under it. The magic of the real presence of distress, -- the imploring human eye, the frail, trembling human hand, the

> despairing appeal of helpless agony, -- these he had never tried. (77)

Seeing in this scene accomplishes what rational debate on the senate floor or the reasonable and heartfelt arguments of Mrs. Bird could not. Mr. Bird is moved by Eliza's physical signs of bodily and emotional torment expressed though the physical lexicon of emotion: "the imploring human eye, the frail trembling hand, the despairing appeal of helpless agony" (Ibid). The effect of what Stowe calls the "magic of the real presence of distress" is the sympathetic response of the witness, the change of heart, and the movement to action that Mr. Bird experiences. In the moment when Mr. Bird cries for Eliza, his subjectivity as a white man and a senator is elided, and he is for a moment merged with the concerns with the sufferer.

The first passage from Uncle Tom's Cabin I quoted presents another discursive facet of the sentimental by calling attention to the limits of other types of discourse. Not only does the "reasonable" debate in the legislature fail to convince Mr. Bird of the injustice of slavery, the legal and commercial language he has encountered occludes injustice and conceals the humanity of the subjects of those laws. The sentimental represents an effort to pierce that occlusion and revive the humanity of the subjects. By making a spectacle of the humanity of the slaves governed by the fugitive laws, they become more than "words on a

page," words that serve to widen the distance between slave owners and slavery condoners and the slaves themselves.

Sentimental texts often make note of the limits of the word. Emotional scenes often end abruptly because the emotions involved are so powerful that they defy description. The limits of words are also pointed to typographically. Characters cannot give voice to what they feel, though they try, and the failure is expressed in broken sentences, dashes, and ellipses that convey that more is meant than can possible be said. These dashes and broken verbal expressions are a part of the sentimental's aesthetic of excess in that they point to emotion beyond expression, and at the same time they underscore the need for a discourse that is not so logo-centric. Sentimental texts try to deliver this through description, but acknowledge that they can only partially succeed, as the pictures they create are only just words themselves.

Often authors, especially Stowe, invoke visual mediums when depicting a particular scene or character. Theatrical language is used, and we close one "scene," as if with curtains, to open upon another. Stowe refers to an early form of photography when describing Tom for the first time: "as he is to be the hero of our story, we must daguerreotype him for our readers" (18). The narrators in these instances cue the reader's visual imagination for a number of reasons. The imagination can provide the visuals that words can only invoke, and seeing is

conceived of as what most effectively excites a sympathetic response. The sentimental represents the hope of a type of communication that can expose rather than elide humanity, and thereby dissolve the divisions between people that other types of discourses erect.

Tears and the Perceiving/Communicating Eye

If sentimental aesthetics represent a hope for clear, authentic communication, the tear is its emblem. For eighteenth-century philosophers, the ability to cry for another person is uniquely human. Rousseau, for instance, argued that pity is so natural a sentiment that even animals exhibit signs of it; however, he goes on to insist upon the superiority of human compassion: "*Nature, in giving men tears, bears witness that she gave the human race the softest hearts*" (53-54). In Charlotte Temple, tears and humanity are collapsed: When Mrs. Beauchamp feels compassion for the betrayed and abandoned Charlotte, she finds "the pellucid drop of humanity stealing down her cheek" (75). Sympathy, at its most distilled and least mediated, resembles an eye-to-eye exchange, with tears both communicating feeling and signally the reception of such a communication.

The sentimental aesthetic is the formulation of a type of communication that dissolves with tears the barriers presented by, to use Harriet Beecher Stowe's

words, "the sophistries of worldly policy" that sway and pervert the sympathies, and perhaps even wash clear the reason that clouds access to compassion (Uncle Tom's Cabin 385). The conventions of sentimental fiction put before the eyes spectacles of feeing and of suffering powerful enough to cut through the complacency brought on by reason and reflection, custom and prejudice. Through the spectacles of suffering and distress, one may *know* an injustice because of how it makes one *feel*.

The eye in sentimental fiction is depicted as the site of both the reception and the production of authentic communication. The eyes of characters that cry produce undeniable physical evidence of their emotion. Tears come even when they are unwelcome and very often "escape" down the cheeks of characters in sentimental novels. The look or expression about one's eyes can reveal even what the rest of the body attempts to conceal. For instance, in The Wide, Wide World, when Ellen frantically asks her mother whether she is to be left behind when her parents travel to Europe, Mrs. Montgomery is momentarily unable to reply due to strong emotion. Speech, however, was "not necessary; her little daughter understood the answer of her eye" (11). Transparency of communication in this case comes not from tears, for none are indicated, but from some expression of Mrs. Montgomery's eyes. In Uncle Tom's Cabin, a sentimental text that places perhaps the greatest emphasis on spectacle and

vision, the eye frequently conveys spiritual and psychological states that the body – especially the enslaved body – tries to hide.

Stowe also contrasts the "natural language" of the eye with the inauthentic written language of the law. Legal language diminishes and even suppresses rather than represents the humanity of the subjects of those laws, fugitive laws most especially. As a result, legislators like Mr. Bird who have little contact with slaves save his contact with them in legal code so that "his idea of a fugitive was only an idea of the letters that spell the word, -- or at most the image of a little newspaper picture of a man with a stick and bundle, with 'Ran away from the subscriber' under it" (77). Even when Stowe personifies the law, she gives it an eye: Although George Harris is "possessed of a handsome person and pleasing manners" and other "superior qualifications" he is "viewed in the eye of the law not a man" (10). The "eye of the law" in Uncle Tom's Cabin is unsympathetic: It cannot be moved by the suffering caused by its legal code, nor is it affected by the qualities of those it governs. Slave owners and those who would support slavery have put between themselves and slaves the discourse of the law. In a sense they have replaced themselves and their gaze with the inhuman, inhumane eye of the law.

The Reader's Gaze

While the eye is important, so is the reader's imagination. Necessary to the sympathetic response is the imaginative changing of places between the spectator and the sufferer. Assisting in this imaginative process is the lively presentation of details that Smith finds so necessary to the imaginary changing of places upon which sympathy is founded. The static moments in sentimental texts set these details before the eyes and imagination of the reader. The narrative movement is stilled and a narrator often intercedes to guide the reader's gaze about a particular sight or tableau.

While the text may often aim for a tearful, sympathetic response and use the signs that according to natural language theory are universally understood, a universal response on the part of the readership is not assumed. Authors acknowledge that they have different kinds of readers when they apostrophize. Susannah Rowson, in fact, developed a narrator to address and even put into dialogue readers predisposed to an unsympathetic eye. This narrator sets out to allay the fears the "sober matron" who might "deign to turn over these pages" of Charlotte Temple before allowing her daughter to see them (28). At another point, the narrator also has a "conversation" with the "young, volatile reader" who she images would proclaim "'I shall never have the patience to get through these volumes, there are so many ahs! And ohs! So much fainting, tears, and

distress, I am sick to death of the subject'" (98). An apostrophe urges the young skeptic with "a sarcastic smile" not to throw down the book and expresses a hope that the reader's heart has not been "rendered impenetrable by unbounded prosperity, or a continuation in vice" (99). On still another occasion, the narrator stops to address the readers who "love to cavil at every trifling omission," and concludes her remarks with, "I hope, Sir, your prejudices are now removed in regard to the probability of my story? Oh they are. Well then, with your leave, I will proceed" (106). By addressing types of readers, Rowson acknowledges the variety of her readers and the fact that they are not all ideal readers, people whose sympathies are sensitive to pathetic displays.

Readers of sentimental fiction are provoked and guided, and their own experiences are called upon to foster identification with characters and their situations. One strategy conventional to the sentimental novel is the placing of an object between the reader and the text that invokes the reader's own experience. The sentimental object, as I will call it, induces the imaginary changing of places between the reader and a character that Smith writes about: "By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him" (9). In this passage, Smith is referring to the witnessing of actual suffering. However, since the process is an imaginative one,

the same process is possible between a reader and a fictional character. What is needed for this imaginary exchange, according to Kames, are vivid images: "The power of language to raise emotions, depends entirely on the raising of such lively and distinct images...the reader's passions are never sensibly moved, till he is thrown into a kind of reverie; which state, forgetting that he is reading, he conceives every incident as passing in his presence, precisely as if he were an eye-witness" (53). Adding in the arousing of especially vivid feelings then are objects likely to have resonance in the reader's own life, that have gathered about them sentimental significance, and which facilitate an even more profound changing of places. A sentimental object found again and again in sentimental novels is a piece of children's clothing, often that of a dead child. Ruth Hall, for instance fondles the shoe of her first born, who dies of he croup in the first third of the novel. Mrs. Montegomery of The Wide Wide World lingers over the clothing and affects of the child she will never see again. Stowe is explicit about her invocation of an experience common to mothers during the nineteenth century:

> His wife opened the little bed-room door adjoining her room, and, taking a candle, set it down on the top bureau there; then from a small recess she took a key, and put it thoughtfully in the lock of a drawer, and made a sudden pause, while two boys, who, boy like, had followed close on her heels, stood looking, with silent, significant glances, at their mother. And oh! Mother that reads this, has there never been in your house a drawer, or a closet,

> the opening of which has been to you like the opening again of a little grave? Ah! Happy mother that you are, if it has not been so.
>
> Mrs. Bird slowly opened the drawer. There were little coats of many a form and pattern, piles of aprons, and rows of small stockings; and even a pair of little shoes, worn and rubbed at the toes, were peeping from the folds of a paper. There was a toy horse and wagon, a top, a ball, -- memorials gathered with many a tear and many a heart-break! She sat down by the drawer, and, leaning her head on her hands over it, wept till the tears fell through her fingers into the drawer; then suddenly raising her head, she began, with nervous haste, selecting the plainest and most substantial articles, and gathering them into a bundle.
>
> "Mamma," said one of the boys, gently touching her arm, "are you going to give away *those* things?"
>
> "My dear boys," she said, softly and earnestly, "if our dear, loving little Henry looks down from heaven, he would be glad to have us do this. I could not find it in my heart to give them away to any common person – to anybody that was happy; but I give them to a mother more heart-broken and sorrowful than I am; and I hope God will send his blessings in them!" (75-76)

The clothes of a dead and beloved child, are introduced, dwelled upon, and embroidered with sensory details, which gather about them sacred significance. Their introduction represents a pause in the narrative, a time for reflection and feeling. The great tenderness of the grieved mother and the situation of a mother in danger of losing her child, which is the case for Eliza, are brought together. Mrs. Bird changes places with Eliza, as the reader may change places with both. The object of the cap brings Eliza and Harry's situation home to Mr. Bird:

> He had never thought that a fugitive might be a hapless mother, a defenceless child, -- like that one which was now wearing his lost boy's well-known cap; and so our poor senator was not stone or steel, -- as he was a man, and a downright noblehearted one, too, -- he was, as everybody must see, in a sad case for his patriotism. (77)

Mr. Bird here models the proper sympathetic response to the details put before the reader. Archibald Alison, in his popular text Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste, showed particular interest in the imagination and what a reader/spectator brings to bear upon their sense experiences. For Alison, a sight could be rendered more affecting if a person had particular associations with the object, and if the object provoked "resemblances" in the mind. The goal of producing such a powerful identification is not an aestheticization of sentiment that simply increases the pleasure or intensity of the reading experience, but rather the goal is personal transformation and even action.

To conclude, legibility is tied to a period-wide focus on the physical gestures and attitudes that express emotion. Faith in the legibility of the physical lexicon of emotion is tied to the view that natural language theory provides accurate insights into human nature. The focus on emotion is tied to politico-moral goals. Therefore, the emotional content of the sentimental novel is not histrionic, in the sense of being out of control or an empty aestheticism of emotion, but is theoretically guided and morally preferred. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate that this same preoccupation with the physical expression of emotion informs film, and the same lexicon of emotion provides a signifying storehouse for performers in D. W. Griffith's feature films. Moreover, I will

show that late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century oratory and acting continues to be dominated by the natural language theory.

CHAPTER 3

SPECTACULAR ELOQUENCE: NATURAL LANGUAGE AND PERFORMANCE IN THE FILMS OF D. W. GRIFFITH

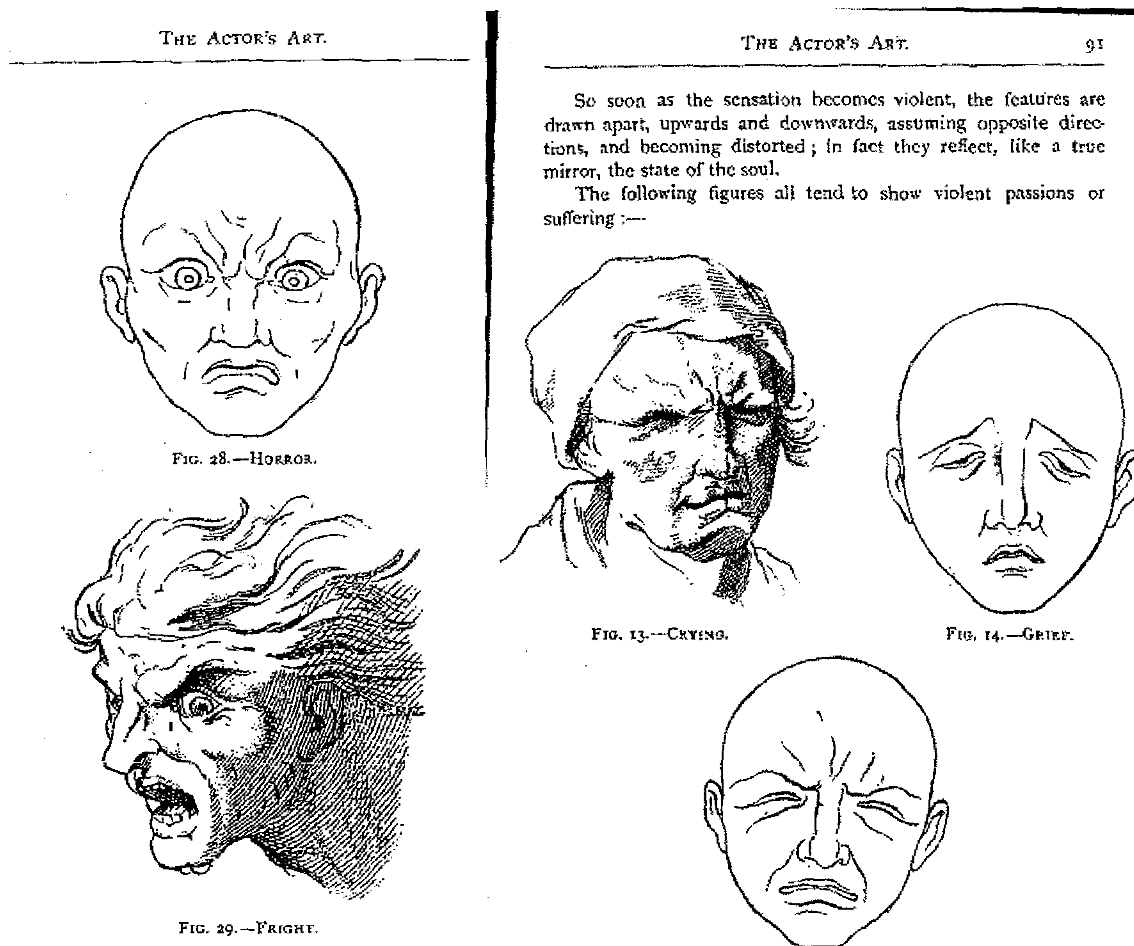
Spectacular emotional display is a characteristic common to the sentimental novel and early film. Characters in both mediums suffer mutely and emote athletically. In the last chapter I applied natural language theory and nineteenth-century oratorical instruction to the aesthetics of the sentimental novel in order to render those moments of emotional spectacle more legible. Along with oratorical gesture, the physical lexicon of emotion represents a storehouse of purely spectacular signs conceivably useful to the initially silent medium of film. With this chapter I argue that silent film performers also employed the physical lexicon of emotion theorized as a natural language by rhetoricians, illustrated in elocution manuals, and enacted by characters of sentimental novels. Through a review of scholastic and popular elocution and acting manuals, I will show that such a storehouse of signs existed and that the theoretical framework of natural language continued to shape emotional representation through the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Repetition of Signs: Illustrations and Descriptions

A common practice among authors of elocution and acting manuals is the echoing, quoting and even reprinting of each other's work. This practice extended to the illustrations depicting oratorical gestures, postures, and facial expressions corresponding to particular passions. The result of this repetition is a solidification of the meanings attached to the signifiers and the emergence of a legible signifying system. One very popular series of illustrations that appeared in both acting and elocution manuals comes from a seventeenth-century source, Charles Le Brun's drawings from the Conference on the Expressions of the Passions, based on a lecture the painter gave in 1668. Le Brun was arguably the most influential French artist of his day: He was a co-founder of the Academie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, he designed and directed the furnishing of Versailles, and his own paintings were often engraved and reprinted (Alan T. McKenkie, introduction, iii-iv).

Le Brun's lecture to the Royal Academy and the accompanying drawings of the passions were meant as useful illustrations for the artist. Versions of the lecture were published first in France, and then in Amsterdam and London. Others used the drawings as illustrative of their theories of physiognomy, as did Johann Caspar Lavater in his 1772 Essays on Physiognomy. One hundred years

on, Le Brun's drawings were still being reprinted. Here, from Gustave Garcia's The Actor's Art (1888) are a few of Le Brun's illustrations:



THE ACTOR'S ART.

FIG. 28.—HORROR.

FIG. 29.—FRIGHT.

THE ACTOR'S ART. 91

So soon as the sensation becomes violent, the features are drawn apart, upwards and downwards, assuming opposite directions, and becoming distorted; in fact they reflect, like a true mirror, the state of the soul.

The following figures all tend to show violent passions or suffering :—

FIG. 13.—CRYING.

FIG. 14.—GRIEF.

Illustration 1. Le Brun's drawings of the passions found in Gustave Garcia's The Actor's Art.

Garcia credits both Le Brun and Lavater's work for his own chapter on physiognomy. Reaching back to earlier illustrations of the passions reinforces the idea that they are timeless, universal expressions of the soul. Thus, the artist, being the actor for Garcia and the painter for Le Brun, would do well to study these expressions. In fact, Garcia advises his students "to analyze these different expressions, which represent the various sentiments of passions of the soul" and then "to imitate them before a looking-glass" (98). Unless the actor masters the expressions of passions that are supposed to animate the soul, s/he "will never become a great artist" (Ibid).

In 1927 an English translation of Charles Aubert's The Art of Pantomime was published in the United States. The illustrations and descriptions of various emotions states resemble those of Le Brun's. Here, for example is Aubert's version of "Astonishment":

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Fig. 190.

Astonishment.

Principal movements: Eyebrows raised high. Mouth open ready to shout. Shoulders raised.

Attitude: Fig. 15.

Sudden sensation, paralysing all the faculties for the moment, is betrayed by the raised eyebrows: the mouth opens to cry out. The half-finished smile in this illustration indicates the surprise is rather agreeable.

THE ART OF PANTOMIME 143

Fig. 191.

Stupefaction

The same movements as the preceding but much more marked.

Attitude: Fig. 16.

This is astonishment at its peak. The whole being is petrified, stupefied. Will and intelligence are entirely gone. In this degree astonishment no longer permits any sign of pleasure. As will be demonstrated, stupefaction can only be joined to a sentiment of fear.

Illustration 2. "Astonishment" and "Stupefaction" from Charles Aubert's The Art of Pantomime, first published in Paris as <u>L'Art Mimique</u> in 1901.

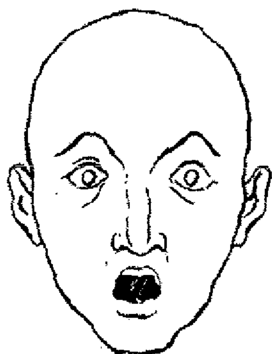

Illustration 3. Le Brun's "Astonishment."

As the reprinting and mirroring of images demonstrated by the above illustrations suggest, there is a persistent and consistent discourse surrounding the facial and gestural expression of emotion from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century.

As I have said, James Burgh's The Art of Speaking (1762) was a vastly influential text, in the field of elocution but also in acting. His descriptions of the passions were quoted and paraphrased by rhetoricians throughout the nineteenth century – and also by authors of acting manuals. For instance, the author of The Art of Acting (1855), published in England and the United States, devotes a chapter to what he calls the "Expression of Character," which is a descriptive list of emotional and physical states and expressions of ideas. The entire chapter is largely a paraphrase of Burgh's descriptions. From The Art of Acting:

> *Joy*, when sudden and violent, is expressed by clapping of hands, and exulting looks; the eyes are opened wide, and on some occasions raised to Heaven; and the countenance is smiling, not composedly, but with features aggravated. (17)

Now here is Burgh's description of joy from The Art of Speaking:

> *Joy*, when sudden and violent, expresses itself by *clapping* of *hands*, and *exultation*, or leaping. The *eyes* are *opened* wide; perhaps filled with *tears*; often raised to *heaven*, especially by devout persons. The countenance is smiling, not composedly, but with features

> *aggravated.* The voice rises, from time to time, to very *high* notes. (15).

The author does not credit Burgh or any other acting tradition; he assumes these are the feelings and states of mind as they are experienced in life and which the actor for his art must study. The fact that Garcia feels no need to cite an authority demonstrates the self-evidence of these descriptions and the deep entrenchment of natural language in the culture.

Gilbert Austin's Chironomia serves as a compendium of gesture instruction and natural language theory up until the date of its publication in 1806. Austin quotes at length from Kames' Elements of Criticism, including the claims about the universality of emotional expression: "The natural signs of emotions, voluntary and involuntary, being nearly the same in all men, form an universal language which no distance of place, no difference of tribe, no diversity of tongue, can darken or render doubtful" (472). He also includes the passage from Kames that spells out the body's physical postures that correspond to emotional states that appears as a table in chapter 2 of this dissertation. Austin references Walker's Elements of Elocution (1781), which is largely excerpted from Burgh, but declines quoting from the book since it "ought to be in the hands of every public speaker" anyway (482). Austin's steel engravings were frequently reprinted in elocution manuals, his instructions widely quoted, often

without acknowledgement of the source, and "until the appearance of Delsarte ... Austin was the authority on the teaching of gesture [in England and America]" (xvii, introduction, Mary Margaret Robb and Lester Thonssen).

The Delsarte System

The persistent tradition of natural language-based instruction informed acting practices, but how widespread was it influence? Very popular in the late nineteenth-century were elocution manuals intended for home use, in whose pages the enthusiast might find instruction in argumentation; however, the bulk of the text was typically devoted to illustrations of poses and gestures expressive of specific emotional states (e.g., despair, elation, shame, pride) or actions (e.g., pleading, dismissing, exhorting). Of the great mass of popular elocution manuals printed in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, many professed to follow the Delsarte method. The French originator of an elaborate and somewhat mystical schematic for the expression of mental and emotional states, Francois Delsarte never came to the United States, but his American protégé, Steele MacKaye is largely credited with popularizing his methods in America.

The influence and prevalence of Delsarte's ideas was profound. Not only did middle-class Americans purchase heaps of Delsartean elocution manuals and

recitation books, but a diverse physical culture grew out of Delsarte's teachings.[1] Advertisements exhorted "every elocutionist, every singer, every teacher, and every other cultured person" to study the Delsarte method as a way of "acquiring grace, dignity, and fine bearing for society people" (quoted in Cole and Chinoy 187). According to Naremore's account in Acting in the Cinema: "Ultimately, the 'Delsarte Movement' was so deeply embedded in the culture that a good many actors could be described as Delsartean whether or not they ever studied him – just as middle-class Americans once behaved according to Emily Post whether on not they actually read her advice" (53). In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a number of acting schools formed with the purpose of training professional actors for the theater. In 1884, MacKaye opened in New York the most enduring of these schools, the Lyceum Theatre School, which has survived to the present as the American Academy of Dramatic Arts (Wallace 621).

Delsarte shared a number of the natural language's precepts. He held that gesture is our first and prime language; and because emotion is universally experienced, its signifiers are universally understood, giving the connection between signifier and signified a clarity that does not exist in spoken language:

[1] For a discussion of American Delsartism in its many forms, as practiced and applied by a variety of teachers, see Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter's The Cultivation of Body and Mind in Nineteenth-Century American Delsartism.

> Gesture is the direct agent of the heart. It is the fit manifestation of feeling. It is the revealer of thought and the commentator upon speech. It is the elliptical expression of language; it is the justification of the additional meanings of speech. In a word, it is the spirit of which speech is merely the letter. Gesture is parallel to the impression received; it is, therefore, always anterior to speech, which is but a reflected and subordinate expression. (192)

Like many influential rhetoricians of the nineteenth century, Delsarte viewed persuasion as a fundamental goal of art, an end reached through stirring the emotions. Accordingly, Delsarte counsels the artist to have, "three objects: To *move*, to *interest*, to *persuade*. He interests by *language*; he moves by *thought*; he moves, interests and persuades by *gesture*" (192).[2]

Given the widespread interest in elocution, in the Delsarte method in its various forms, and in systems for signifying emotion in general, I think its fair to say that audiences, most especially the middle-class audiences which producers of motion pictures increasingly hoped to attract, were interested in emotional expression and familiar with oratorical gestures.[3] Moreover, because oratorical instruction was given at all educational levels, audiences – especially middle-

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[2] Delsarte left behind very little writing of his own. What I include of Delsarte's is quoted in Actors on Acting, edited by Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, and is from Delsarte System of Oratory: Containing All the Literary Remains of Francois Delsarte (Given in His Own Words), translated by Abby L. Alger. New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1893, pp. 465-468, 486-487, 522-529.

[3] Tom Gunning discusses the film industry's desire for greater social respectability and its courting of middle-class audiences in the chapter 6 of D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film.

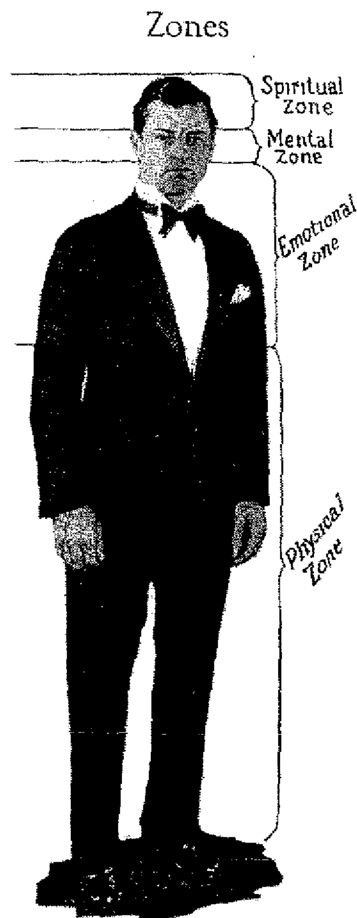
class audiences --, filmmakers in general and actors in particular were likely schooled in gesture and the physical lexicon of emotion. Apart from public education, there was a great deal of overlap between acting and elocution instruction. Authors of elocution manuals were often actors themselves, and, as I have already shown, the descriptions of the same passions that appeared in elocution texts were used in acting manuals. With the waning of stock theater companies after the Civil War, actors hired a play at a time would only play a handful of parts a season, compared "to playing the many and various roles required by the frequent change of stock bills" (Hodge 553). The 1880s and 1890s saw the opening of many professional acting schools that offered additional training to actors. Many of the most important schools of expression were run by Mackaye's students, who took with them the lessons of Delsarte, the most important being Lewis Monroe, S. S. Curry, Genevieve Stebbins, and Franklin Sargent (Hodge 564).

Delsarte's system was rather mystical, being based on the Christian Trinity and dividing the sites of expression into threes: The lower trunk and legs are the source of what is vital or physical, the upper trunk and arms are the spiritual and moral, while the head is the site of the mental and intellectual (Ruyter 77). From here there are further divisions of three. Whether or not one studied with a Delsartean, someone who claimed to follow the Delsarte system

(there were lots of arguments about who were the *real* Delsarteans), or studied some other system or text offering instruction in gestures and facial expressions, one would encounter the basic tenets of natural language theory, which are as follows: Human emotion has universal expression, especially strong emotion; seeing the signs of emotion is emotionally stirring; the artist's goal is to stir the emotions; and the purpose of art it is excite the emotions in the service of the moral improvement of the audience. Nineteenth-century schools of expression taught students, which included actors, how to hit upon these universal emotional expressions.

Given the widespread influence of the Delsarte system, it seems clear that the physical lexicon at work in sentimental novels also informed acting in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. But did film actors draw upon this code, and if so how might an understanding of natural language theory and the physical lexicon of emotion inform readings of silent film performance and contribute to film history? One indication that Delsarte's ideas continued to hold sway well into the twentieth century comes from a 1928 acting manual written by the actor, director, and producer John E. Ince. The Manual of the Cinema Schools, Incorporated was designed, according to the book's forward, "as a daily companion and first aid for pupils entering upon a course of training to develop

him or herself either for the silent or talking motion pictures." In the "Home Studies" chapter is an illustration of the actor and the "zones" of his body.



The idea that the body incorporates not only the physical but also mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects, and that the zones should guide an actor's performance are clearly Delsartean.

Illustration 4. The actor's body divided into zones of expression.

In arguing for the influence of the sentimental novel and natural language over film acting, I do not mean to supplant theatrical melodrama as a primary contributor to film melodrama. Melodrama was the predominant theatrical form in the United States in the nineteenth century. As A. Nicholas Vardac argues in Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffth (1940), the motion picture took up melodrama from the stage and took it over, the result being that theatrical melodrama experienced a precipitous decline. Vardac argues that many of the practices of theatrical melodrama were adopted by filmmakers, including the heightened spectacular effects and pictoral realism, and could actually stage them better (30-31). Moreover, many early full-length motion pictures were adaptations of plays. E. S. Porter's The Great Train Robbery was originally a play, as was Griffith's Enoch Arden. One of the earliest full-length films was Porter's version of Uncle Tom's Cabin, which experienced enormous popularity on the stage. In 1900 there were 500 companies performing Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Theatrical melodrama is also the primary source for acting styles in the film melodramas. What I hope my work reveals is that the sentimental novel and early film share the conceptual framework of natural language and a signifying system for emotional representation. While it is not the subject of this dissertation to demonstrate an explicit between natural language and stage

melodrama, such a link can be inferred. Others have linked Delsartism with the stage, for instance Richard Dyer in Stars. He considers Delsarte as a recorder of theatrical melodramatic practice (138). My contention is natural language theory and the signifying system that it supports has a continuing influence that extending into filmic acting styles.

Natural Language in D. W. Griffith's Broken Blossoms

For an example of the filmic use of oratorical gesture and the lexicon of emotion as described by natural language rhetoricians and used by authors of sentimental fiction, I now turn to D. W. Griffth's Broken Blossoms. As Kristin Thompson has observed, "Few aspects of silent films seem so alien to the modern viewer as the performances of their actors" (189). Donald Crisp's performance in Broken Blossoms (1919) has to be one of the more peculiar and alien of silent film performances. His mugging and posing bring to my mind Mussolini's balcony addresses. My hypothesis is that much of the meaning that may have been evident to a contemporary audience is lost on a present-day audience because we lack the knowledge of the signifying practices out of which Crisp's performance emerges. Conducting an inter-textual reading that includes elocution and acting texts informed by natural language illuminates Crisp's performance.

Crisp's character is introduced with an intertitle: "Battling Burrows, an abysmal brute – a gorilla of the jungles of East London – gloating on his victory over the 'Limehouse Tiger.'" The following sequence of shots establishes Burrows' brutish character, at home and in the ring. At home, Burrows sits drinking, a table at his elbow. His legs are wide, his is head thrown back, his upper lip is raised in a sneer, and his lower lip protrudes outward. He pours himself glass after glass, drinking each down in one go, while the bottle remains in his other hand between pours. When done drinking for the moment, Crisp puffs his chest out and tucks his thumbs in his belt. Next we see Burrows in the ring, sitting in a similar posture, only shirtless and gloved, anticipating his boxing match. His back is tremendously broad, and he seems to feel no anxiety – he even laughs. The match is over soon after it begins when Burrows knocks his opponent to the canvas in one punch. He has another laugh, this time explicitly at his opponent's expense. In the next shot, Burrows is at home, sitting with legs apart and his chest puffed out. The man at home is not so different from the boastful and terrible man of the ring, who is seated in roughly the same position.

When we return to the scene of Burrows at home, his manager, who tries to persuade Burrows to cut back on his drinking, has joined him. At one point, while he stands in a medium shot framed by an iris, Burrows makes a gesture that he will repeat: He reaches his left hand out from his body at about waist

height; his palm is opened towards the floor, and he makes a downward motion. As I will show, with this gesture Crisp is indicating that Burrows rejects the words of his manager.

FIG. 4.—DENYING—REJECTING.
A proposition so infamous should instantly be voted down.

Illustration 5. "Denying" or "Rejecting" from Henry Davenport Northrop's The Delsarte Sytem of Physical Culture, Expression and Elocution.

Illustration 6. Donald Crisp using the rejecting gesture in Broken Blossoms.

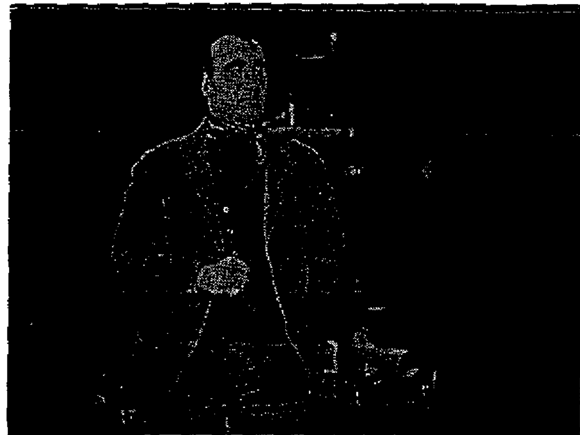


Illustration 7. Crisp repeating the rejecting gesture.

Illustration 8. Rejection gesture in tighter shot.

He then follows up with another gesture that is clearly menacing, and one that will also be repeated: He punches a palm with his fist. He then leans back, rocks back and forth, and repeats the palm down gesture of rejection. His chest heaves and his eyes grow large, giving them an appearance of flashing.

The entrance of one of the boxer's girlfriends interrupts his argument with the manager. He grabs at her collar and pulls her closer, pinches her neck, and generally buffets her in a way that is both flirtatious and aggressive. They appear to make plans to meet later. When the girlfriend leaves, the argument between Burrows and his manager resumes. He clenches his fists and again repeats the palm-down gesture of rejection. Burrows also puts his hands in his pockets, a gesture that he will repeat in other scenes. When the manager eventually leaves, Burrows is breathing heavily and his fists are clenched, but he

has so far restrained himself. He picks up a chair and swings it around, but does not break it into pieces, as he might so easily do.

Illustration 9.
Crisp with clenched fists.

Illustration 10.
Crisp grips chair.

Illustration 11. Crisp twirls chair.

In the brutal world of the Limehouse district, Burrows is depicted as the greater brute: stronger, more aggressive, and, as the viewer learns, perfectly willing to terrorize the weak. His brutishness *is* abysmal, since no rational appeal may serve to check it. In this introductory scene, Crisp draws almost entirely upon conventional performance techniques to establish these (and other) elements in his character. Found in popular elocution manuals of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century are descriptions of the facial expressions Crisp uses, as well as illustrations of the postures and gestures he makes in his characterization of Burrows.

Below is an illustration from Edward B. Warman's Gestures and Attitudes: An Exposition of the Delsarte Philosophy of Expression, Practical and Theoretical (1892). The pose depicted looks remarkably like the wide-legged, chest-swelling stance that Crisp takes repeatedly. It should also be noted from the caption that this pose has decided class implications: The man pictured in the tuxedo would presumably never strike this pose except as an actor, while it is the favored posture of a man of Burrow's character and class.

Fig. 86.

Familiar Repose.

Place the feet wider apart than in feebleness. There is a tendency to protrude the abdomen, to put the thumbs in the vest pocket, or to place the arms akimbo. The position is unrefined and exceedingly vulgar.

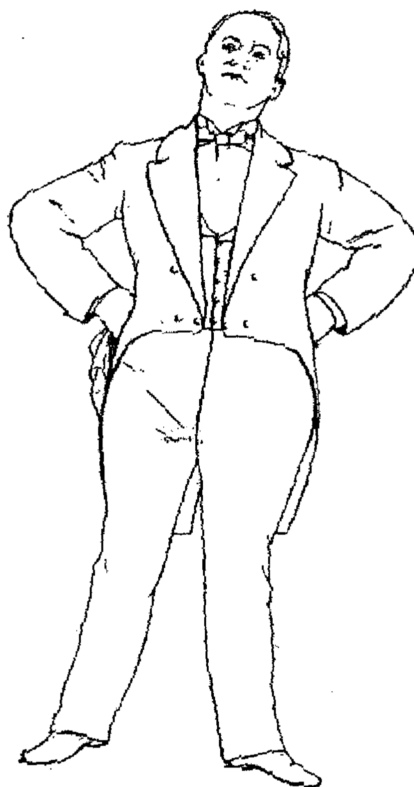


Fig. 86.

Illustration 12. "Familiar Repose."

Illustrations 13-14. Crisp striking a familiar repose.

In this first scene, Crisp also performs particular states of mind and emotion using conventional techniques. One of the earliest and most influential rhetoricians concerned with "action" in public speaking was James Burgh. Compare his description of pride with aspects of Crisp's performance, paying particular attention to the actions of the mouth, arms, hands, and legs [italics his]:

> *Pride* assumes a *lofty* look, bordering upon the aspect and attitude of *anger*. The *eyes open*, but with the *eyebrows* considerably drawn *down*; the *mouth pouting* out; or *shut*, and the *lips pinched* close. The *words* walk out *a-strut*, with a *slow, stiff, bombastic* affectation of importance. The *arms* generally *a-kimbo*, and the *legs* at a *distance* from one another, taking large *tragedy-strides*. (18)

Also very close to Crisp's performance is Burgh's description of boasting.

> *Boasting*, or affected courage, is *loud, blustering, threatening*. The *eyes flare;* the *eyebrows* drawn *down;* the *face* is *red* and *bloated;* the *mouth pouts* out; the voice hollow and *thundering;* the arms are set a-

> kimbo; the *head* often *nodding* in a menacing manner; and the right *fist, clenched,* is *brandished,* from time to time, at the person threatened. The right *foot* is often *stamped* upon the ground, and the *legs* take large *strides,* and the *steps* are so *heavy,* that the earth seems to tremble under them. (18)

Fundamental to Burrows' character is his rage. Again, Burgh's description of anger has bearing on Crisp's performance, and, in particular for me, on what Crisp does with his mouth during moments of intense rage:

> *Anger,* (violent) or rage, expresses itself with *rapidity, interruption, noise, harshness,* and *trepidation.* The *neck stretched* out; the *head forward,* often *nodding* and *shaken* in a *menacing* manner, against the object of the passion. The *eyes red, inflamed, flaring, rolling,* and *sparkling;* the *eyebrows* drawn *down* over them, and the *forehead wrinkled* into clouds. The *nostrils stretched* wide; every *vein swelled;* every *muscle strained;* the breast heaving, and the *breath* fetched *hard.* The *mouth open,* and drawn on each side toward the *ears,* shewing the *teeth,* in a *gnashing* posture. The face bloated, pale, red or, sometimes almost black. *The feet stamping;* the right *arm* often *thrown out,* and *menacing* with the *clenched fist shaken,* and a general violent *agitation* of the whole *body.* (24)

Given the closeness of Crisp's performance to Burgh's descriptions of the passions, one may safely say that for the bulk of his performance he is relying heavily on conventional codes, modified slightly by his own inflections and the demands of his particular character. For instance, while in Burgh's descriptions of anger and boasting the subject is said to clench his fist, Crisp does this a great deal more, and sometimes takes stances that really foreground his fist(s). Presumably this choice has to do with the fact that Burrows is a boxer who

brings his ferocity out of the ring and into his domestic sphere. Crisp also engages in some interesting byplay. Burrows is clearly angry when his manager leaves, so when he grabs the chair one anticipates seeing it broken into pieces. Giving it an almost elegant twirl is a surprise and is an action that develops some dramatic tension: What or whom will Burrows vent his rage upon? When Lucy (Lillian Gish) makes her entrance, the question is answered. Burrows also *repeatedly shoves his fists into his pockets during his conversation with the* manager. Here is an example of idiosyncratic performance depicting supressed feeling. Similarly, when Burrows affectionately menaces his girlfriend, Crisp is establishing Burrows as a person from whom violence is a part of every encounter, either in a suppressed form or as an active threat.

Crisp also makes much of a conventional signifier of anger, the baring of teeth. Not only is this facial expression quite remarkable on its own, Billy Bitzer's camerawork really showcases it by putting Crisp in an extreme close-up. What extra meanings are being conveyed by the exaggeration, repetition, and formal highlighting of this facial expression? To answer this question about a conventional expression, I turn again an elocution manual, John Walker's Elements of Elocution (1810). Walker's description of anger is nearly a direct quote from Burgh, but to it he adds this prefatory comment [italics mine]: "When hatred and displeasure rise high on a sudden form an apprehension of

injury received, and perturbation of mind in consequence of it, it is called anger; and rising to a very high degree, and *extinguishing humanity*, becomes rage and fury" (330).

Illustrations 15-16. Crisp's expression of animal rage, in close-up and extreme close-up.

This idea of a humanity-extinguishing fury carries through to a much later text, Charles Aubert's The Art of Pantomime (1927). In Aubert's conception, in a moment of intense rage, a person becomes more of an animal, the protruding jaw and bared teeth arising perhaps "from an instinctive desire to bite" (121). Burrows' introductory inter-title certainly forwards the idea of his being more animal than human, in fact more animal than the other "animals" in the Limehouse "jungle."

The idea that Burrows is a beast is more meaningful when also taken in context with the conventions and ideology inherent in sentimental fiction that pertain to sympathy. Burrows is not just a beast because he is violent but because he feels no sympathy for the very figure for whom he should feel the most, his daughter. In the hierarchy of sympathy at work in the sentimental novel, and which is still very much at work in silent film, Lucy appears at the top. As I discussed in the first two chapters, moral philosophers like Adam Smith identified sympathy as the feeling that sets humans apart from animals, and also makes possible sociability and justice between people. These ideas are fundamental to the sentimental novel, as is the idea of a sympathetic hierarchy. In a just society, or in human relations when "natural" feelings flow, those we feel most sympathy for are our children, the children of others, and people who are generally vulnerable. We also feel added sympathy for those who demonstrate virtue. Lucy exemplifies all of the above, and Gish's performance of her brings out physical vulnerabilities in particular. Her love of beauty is also a kind of virtue, and one that she shares with Huan Cheng. Burrows is not only insensible to Lucy's weakness, he enjoys terrorizing her, delights in her cringing and crouching. In other words, Burrows is an animal not just because he is a violent but because he lacks the capacity for sympathy that would mitigate that violence.

The effect that Burrows has on Lucy also comes out of an ideology governing feeling informed by natural language theory. To review, emotions and their expressions are innate among humans. The expressions of feelings like love, hate, and happiness are thought to be universal. That Lucy does not know how to smile indicates that Burrows's brutal treatment of her and her generally unhappy surroundings have robbed her of a piece of her humanity. Smiling is a learned and even an unnatural expression for Lucy. Gish enacts both the fact and the horror of this state of affairs when she uses her fingers to push her mouth into a smile, which is made all the more gruesome and unnatural by the fact that her eyes and brow simultaneously register terror.

Illustrations 17-18. Gish forces a smile, then registers terror with her eyes.

Given Crisp's (and Gish's) performance in Broken Blossoms, the physical lexicon is operative in film during the first two decades of the twentieth century. This view is at odds with some of the current film scholarship.

The Current Historical Model:

From the Histrionic to the Verisimilar

A great deal of scholarship has been written about the films of D. W. Griffith, and the performances that appear in his body of work have been perhaps the most written about and theorized of silent film performances. Part of the reason for this is that film historians hold Griffith and his repertory of actors largely responsible for an important shift in acting styles. Griffith's actors are said to have largely done away with the "cookbook" style of acting, which Benjamin MacArthur describes in Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920 this way:

> ...each emotion had its appropriate gesture and facial expression, which were passed down from one generation to the next... Books were written analyzing, classifying, and breaking down gestures and expression into their component parts. (MacAurthur 171)

John Dolman, Jr. remarked in The Art of Acting, "The fundamental concept of codified pantomime... is several thousand years old, while the modern tendency to laugh off all codes and convention is younger than the memory of living men"

(241). When Dolman's book was published in 1949, a generation of audiences that saw this type of performance was still alive.

According to the current historical model, the transition in acting styles occurred in Griffith's films between 1908, when Griffith left the Biograph Company, and 1913. Historian Tom Gunning designates 1909 as point at which the new style was "fully underway" in Griffith's films; however, "its complete development only came in the later years" (259). This new style comes out of what Gunning, following Roberta Pearson's terminology, calls the *verisimilar* code, while the old cookbook style relies on the *histrionic* code.

A number of scholars have specifically written on acting in the cinema, the most prominent being James Naremore, Charles Affron, and Richard Dyer.[4]

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[4]In Acting in the Cinema, James Naremore discusses the work of Delsarte, Aubert, and Steele MacKaye, arguing that Delsarte's "influence persisted alongside psychological realism during the period of silent cinema, and in some ways he deserves reconsideration in our own time" (52). He also goes on to say, "We make an error, therefore, if we assume that theorists like Delsarte and Aubert are relevant only in the realm of arcane histrionics" (65). In Stars, Richard Dyer, also mentions Deslarte, and reproduces some of his codified hand signs. Dyer considers Delsarte as a recorder of melodramatic performance signs rather than a contributor to cinematic performance (Stars 137-138). Roberta Pearson, the pre-eminent scholar on silent performance styles includes Delsarte and other masters of "stylized acting" as contributing to the standardized repertoire passed on "not only through an 'oral' tradition and stock-company training but through descriptions and illustration in acting manuals and handbooks" (21). However Pearson suggests that the similarities between the manuals and silent film performance would only be discernable in early Biographs. "If one were so inclined," she writes, "it would be possible to present numerous instances, complete with frame enlargements and plate reproductions" (23). But doing so, according to Pearson is would be fruitless for two reasons: Biograph performance did not duplicate Desarte's or any other style, and second, the interesting parallels between Biograph and Delsarte lie not in specific poses but in overall principles of histrionically coded acting shared by the Biograph and Delsarte styles. As I have demonstrated, what I find is that the images circulating in popular elocution and acting manuals correspond to the gestures and facial

None of these authors, however, has conducted such a detailed study of silent screen performance as Pearson. Focusing on Griffith's early career, with Eloquent Gestures Pearson strives to create a coherent stylistics of acting and provide an account of the progression of acting styles in Griffith's films that is "informed by the larger social, historical context" (6).[5] The result is a study that works as a companion piece to Tom Gunning's eminent work of film history, D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film.[6]

Pearson's first task is to address what she sees as a nomenclature problem. She finds that critics have applied the terms "melodramatic," "naturalistic," and "realistic" indiscriminately to a diversity of acting styles of Griffith's Biograph period (1908-1913). She proposes two terms to cover the spectrum of acting during this time of transition. The style associated with the early part of the transitional period, which has been called *melodramatic*, she calls the *histrionic*

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expression of actors post-transition. I am not so interested in nailing down what is authentic Delsartism as I am in demonstrating a continued reliance of codified signifying practices expression in general.

[5] In this way Pearson hopes to distinguish herself from the scholarship on acting that precedes hers, specifically James Naremore's Acting in the Cinema and Charles Affron's Star Acting. According to Pearson, both scholars indulge in an exclusive focus on the individual performances of favorite actors, privileging the distinctiveness of their acting styles and failing to take into account the historical and cultural context of performances or texts (5-6).

[6] Gunning and Pearson refer to one another's work. Gunning adopts some of Pearson's terminology and incorporates her model for the progression for the histrionic style to the verisimilar style into D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film. Pearson references Gunning's idea of the narrator system in her work.

style. The performance style that emerged at the end of the transitional period, which has been called *realistic* or *naturalistic*, she calls the *verisimilar* style (8-9). Pearson chose "histrionic" because it means theatrical and stagey and is therefore a fit descriptor for the early cinematic performance style that relied on "gesture from a conventional, standardized repertoire passed on not only through an 'oral' tradition and stock-company training but through descriptions and illustrations in acting manuals and handbooks" (21). These theatrical forms draw upon a conventional set of gestures with a set lexicon of meanings.

For Pearson, the "unchecked histrionic code" is in evidence when

> gestures are quickly performed, heavily stressed, and fully extended, the arms being held upward, downward, or outward from the body. Often these gestures are repeated, either immediately or a little later in a series. Slower, less stressed, and less extended gestures, the arms remaining closer to the body, characterize the checked histrionic code. (27)

When an actor draws upon the histrionic code, s/he is relying on a reflexive signifying system. A histrionic gesture, according to Pearson, is "reflexive, referring to the theatrical event rather than to the outside world" (21). In other words, when film actors used histrionic signs to represent anger, for example, the theatricality of their gestures were really signifying *stage anger*, not anger as it is felt off stage and in the real world.

The movement toward the verisimilar code, Pearson argues, is a shift away from the stock gestures of nineteenth-century theater and toward performance that aims at the mimesis of the everyday. She uses the term *verisimilar* rather than *realistic* so as to denote that when a performer works in the verisimilar mode, s/he is not conforming to reality but "to a particular culture's coded expectations about the artistic representation of reality. Reality in this sense is a cultural construct, a matter of commonly held opinion rather than that which is presumed to have some objective existence outside the text" (28). In practice, Pearson describes the verisimilar code as distinguished by smaller gestures, the limbs staying closer to the body, and by the use of by-play (i.e., the handling of props to establish character), and a greater reliance on facial expressions. Whereas histrionic gestures are large, discrete, and held for emphasis, verisimilar gestures are smaller, flow together, and are idiosyncratic rather than stylized. Verisimilarly coded acting relies on "no standard repertoire of gestures, no limited lexicon. The style defined itself by the very abandonment of the conventional gestures of the histrionic code" (37). In effecting this transition, Pearson contends, "actors moved from a performance style heavily influenced by theatrical melodrama to a style allied to 'realist' movements in literature and the theatre" (4). Pearson acknowledges that what she calls the histrionic style persists through 1913, as occasional deictic gestures (i.e., using

gesture to serve as a kind of pronoun by pointing at oneself for *me*, or at another for *her*, etc.) and is sometimes "resorted to" at climactic moments (59). In Pearson's model, in such moments an actor is referencing a bygone code.

Pearson's model fits into the larger narrative of cinematic development towards what would become classical Hollywood cinema, as defined by Kristen Thompson and David Bordwell' Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960. In this progression, narrative film begins as deeply tied to the conventions of the stage, with the camera used as a static instrument that captures action as if it were playing out on a stage. As the industry develops, film distances itself from the conventions of the stage, the camera moves about to provide a variety of views of the action, and analytical editing takes film from a single-shot venture toward a multi-shot, multi-location concern. When film reaches the period of classical Hollywood cinema, all filmmaking conventions are subordinated to the telling of a story within a familiar, seamlessly constructed visual universe. As the techniques for filmmaking became increasing distant from stage practice and take on uniquely filmic conventions, according to this history, so does acting – especially with the advent of the close-up. With the closer camera, actors rely more on the face when establishing character. As Thompson writes, actors revised the traditional methods to develop a "restrained" or "muted" style of pantomime (190-191).

Gunning has worked the transformation of acting styles into the formation of what he calls the "narrator system":

> The move toward verisimilar acting formed an essential part of the narrator system. The cinema of narrative integration was fashioning a dramaturgy centered on characterization, and Griffith in 1909 bent all three levels of filmic discourse, editing, enframed images, and the pro-filmic to this task. The new style of performance interacted with other levels, the closer camera positions allowing greater use of facial play; as well as editing patterns which revealed motives and intentions eliminating the need for gestural soliloquies. By the end of 1909, the narrator system provided devices on all levels of filmic discourse to convey narrative information, access to character psychology, the dynamization and continuity of film time, and the creation of a coherent diegetic environment. Griffith had created a filmic narrator to comment on overtly, and to guide spectators' reception of, film stories. (229)

Gunning also notes that the histrionic style does not entirely disappear and that some actors "never completely abandoned the conventional or exaggerated gestures of the histrionic style" (Ibid).

With my dissertation I do not imagine that I am overturning this history but rather offering evidence of a greater continuity in acting styles, while providing a rationale for broadening the scope of sources traditionally been considered influential to silent film performance. As Charles Musser has argued so persuasively, the history of cinema does not begin with a series of inventions in the late nineteenth century, but rather is a history of emergence from existing media. This chapter and the next apply Musser's argument to the specific filmic

practice of performance to argue that silent film performance emerged from and continued to be shaped by a number related practices, specifically elocution instruction, pantomime, formal acting instruction, the sentimental novel, and, underwriting all these media, natural language theory.[7] What I find is that while acting did change in Griffith's films during what has been designated as the transitional phase, the signifying practices used by the actors did not become so rapidly unmoored from theatrical or elocutionary traditions as has been represented by film historians.

In addition to Musser, I take a cue from Richard Dyer who argues in Stars that to read performance signs one must recognize that the "signification of a given performance sign is determined by its place within culturally and historically specific codes" (135). The very alien nature of some of silent film performances attests to the veracity of Dyer's claim, since the historical and cultural moment in which these films were made has long ago passed. In my research I found widespread acceptance of the ideas of natural language: I saw direct references to natural language in Uncle Tom's Cabin, in the writings of Delsarte and Aubert, and in nearly every popular acting or elocution manual I picked up. What these findings suggest is a fundamental difference in popular

[7] In The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907, Musser argues that cinema was not suddenly invented new art form but rather emerged out of a number of existing "screen practices" (1).

ideas about the experience and expression of emotion before the advent of depth psychology, which invariably shaped expectations of emotional representation.

The film I discussed earlier, Broken Blossoms, was released in 1919, when the verisimilar style should be well established and the histrionic defunct as a code. However, Crisp's performance is in some ways illegible without a familiarity with the very materials that make up the histrionic code, the conventional, standardized repertoire of gestures and expressions described and depicted in acting manuals and elocution handbooks. Gentle byplay is a part of Crisp's performance, as evidenced in his twirling of the chair, the jamming of his hands into his pocket, but so are oratorical gesture and pantomime. In fact, all of Griffith's films feature performances that rely on the conventional repertoire. More generally, the prevalence of and abiding interest in acting instruction, both formal and informal, that relies on the ideas of natural language suggests that the histrionic was no bygone code. Furthermore, I do no not want to employ "histrionic" as a term, first, because the source is not simply stage but elocution practices, and second, because the signs of the physical lexicon do not represent a closed signifying system that refers only to stage practice and not the world beyond the stage.

I am not denying that acting styles transformed in Griffith films between 1908 and 1913. The actors do slow down as movies get further away from their origins in the cinema of attractions, the films are certainly more character-driven, and the introduction of the close-up allows for more nuanced gestures and expressions. The changes, however, were not of the categorical kind that would come later, with the advent of sound and the popularization of Freudian psychology.

With the introduction of depth psychology, actors must perform repression and convey the idea that something other than the ostensible is at work in a character. Post-Freudian film thus faces the question: how does one render legible the repressed? After all, natural language theorized the physical lexicon as a window into the soul, thus their signs only function on face value. For actors, Stanislavski answered this question by calling upon the actors to draw upon their own experiences, conscious and subconscious. Filmmakers also found ways to represent the "hysteria bubbling all the time just below the surface" that Freud theorized (Elsaesser 76). Douglas Sirk is perhaps most famous for imbuing the mise en scene of his films with the barely contained repressed drives of the characters. Thomas Elsaesser theorized about this practice in his ground breaking article, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama." In it he quotes Sirk about his approach to Written

on the Wind: "Almost throughout the picture I used deep-focus lenses, which have the effect of giving a harshness to the objects and kind of enamelled, hard surface to the colours. I wanted to bring out the inner violence, the energy of the characters, which is all inside them and can't break through" (68).

The introduction of depth psychology thus exposes a limit to the resources that elocutionary manuals and the theories of natural language upon which they were based provided. But prior to that moment, the early silent era happily shared a resource with the sentimental novel, one that, now recalled, brings legibility to gestures and behaviors that often strike us as overly dramatic, even out of control. In the next chapter, we'll see that early film, particularly The Birth of a Nation, has even more in common with the traditions surrounding the sentimental novel.

CHAPTER 4

DOING AND UNDOING THE SENTIMENTAL

By examining more of Griffith's films, I will now extend my thesis that a greater continuity in acting styles than is represented in the current historical model can be found in cinema beyond the transitional years. Comparing a number of performances in Griffith's films to images and descriptions from acting manuals and elocution texts, I demonstrate that the actors not only rely upon stock gestures but even perform emphatic rather than restrained versions of them. In this chapter I also conduct a sustained reading of The Birth of a Nation, applying the broader conventions of the sentimental novel to the film, while demonstrating the continued use of the physical lexicon of emotion theorized by natural language. My interest in taking this inter-textual approach is not only to deepen readings of The Birth of a Nation but also to follow up on something I noticed long ago: Griffith's films are very sentimental. But are they sentimental just in the colloquial sense or do they follow the deep structures of the sentimental novel? The films are definitely designed to provoke emotion, and they employ pathetic scenes and emotional display to that end. Furthermore, the films feature heroines resemble the heroines of sentimental

novels. With so many aesthetic and generic commonalities, do sentimental novels and the films of D. W. Griffith perform the same cultural work?

Once aware of the physical lexicon of emotion, one finds in silent films a collection of seeing a repetition of familiar gestures, postures, and facial expressions. The code made up of pantomimed expressions and postures and oratorical gesture is thus not only viable after 1912, but relied upon. For instance, when in Orphans of the Storm Henriette (Lillian Gish) pleads with the Marquis's decadent party guests, she uses a stock gesture for pleading. Gish's arms are spread and extended out from her body. As Burgh describes exhortation, "the arms are sometimes spread, with the hands open, as intreating" (375). Below is an illustration of pleading from Warman's Gestures and Attitudes, which matches closely with Gish's gesture. To use Pearson's terminology, Gish could be using a modified or "checked" version of a "histrionic" gesture. However, the gesture Gish uses is a more emphatic form of pleading than the one pictured. The actress leans forward, her arms are spread wider, and she adds to it an appeal heavenward. As Gestures and Attitudes mentions, there a number of different poses for pleading, but most have the speaker/actor with arms raised considerably higher, which would indicate she is appealing from a different position, one of authority. Henriette has been

kidnapped by a depraved Marquis and brought to a party of debauched aristocrats; her situation is desperate. Her face registers her need with an expression found in The Art of Pantomine: "The head is well advanced and titled backward. The eyebrows are raised and slightly contracted…Extreme desire, which is painful, is manifest in the light frown…Then the head advanced and tilted back betrays the ardor and intensity of the passion" (125).

Illustration 19. "Pleading."

Illustration 20. Gish's emphatic versions of the pleading gesture.

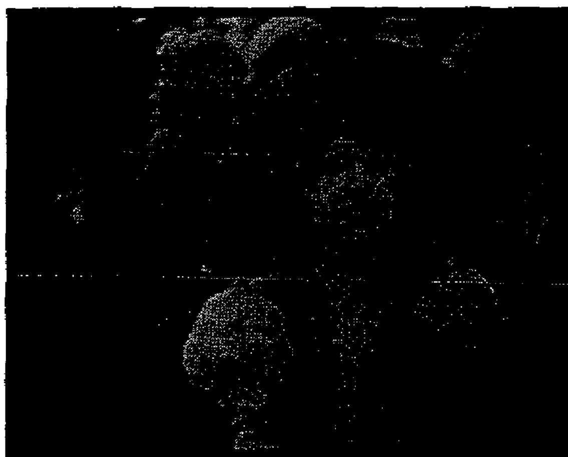


Illustration 21. Gish adds an expression of entreaty to her gesture.

Another instance of emphatic gesturing comes by way of Way Down East. When Squire Barlett (Burr McIntosh) learns the secret of Anna's illegitimate

child, he commands her to leave the house, which means entering a blizzard. In doing so, he gathers up all his patriarchal authority into the gesture he holds and repeats the gesture several times. In fact, he is photographed from different positions in this commanding posture. Squire Bartlett's face in this scene indicates anger and at times that humanity-squelching rage I discussed in the last chapter, when with eyes flashing he bares his lower teeth. The film lingers here, the full import of the squire's accusations taking time to unfold and fully register with David Bartlett, the squire's son who is in love with Anna. The holding and repeating of the gestures in this scene underscores the idea of a primal or timeless moment: The patriarch exercising his power to judge and expel a member of the household. It is also confrontation between patriarch and son, the father denying the son his beloved, and David becomes enraged at his father.

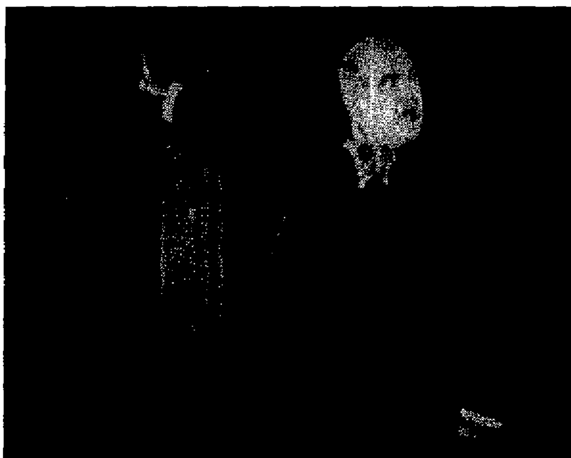
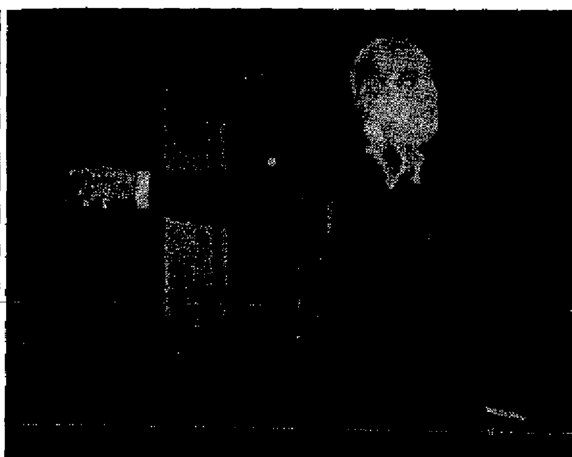


Illustration 22. Squire Bartlett commands Anna to leave.

Illustration 23. Squire Bartlett points an accusing finger at Anna.



Illustrations 24-25. Repetitions of the command to leave, with lower-teeth exposed.

However, Anna breaks in to do some pointing of her own, this time to accuse the man who tricked her into a shame marriage. Gish uses a stock gesture of accusation, as illustrated below in Warman's Gestures and Attitudes: An

Exposition of the Delsarte Philosophy of Expression, Practical and Theoretical. Again, Gish adds emphasis to a standard gesture: She points with one arm while the other is extended slightly out from her body, leans into the gesture toward the accused, and shakes not just her finger but her whole forearm. Even the sharp angle of her accusing finger serves to intensify the gesture.

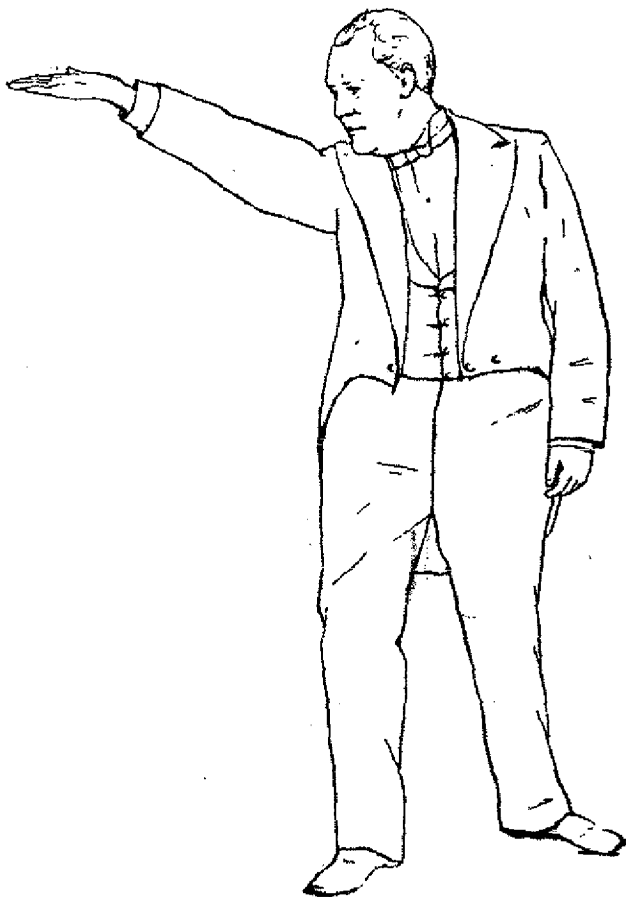


Illustration 26. "Accusation" from Warman's Gestures and Attitudes.

Illustration 27. Gish strikes an accusatory pose.

Illustration 28. Gish points the finger of blame.

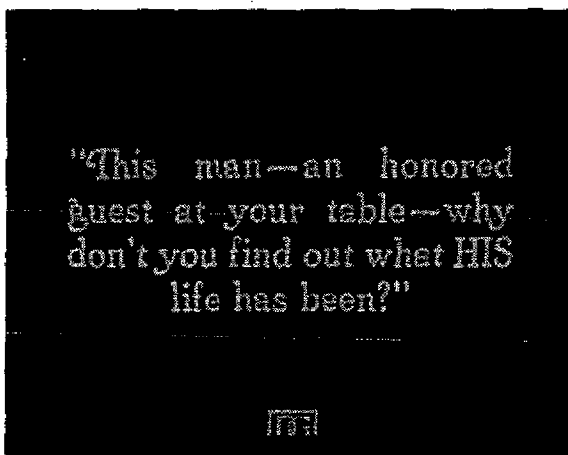


Illustration 29. An intertitle from the climactic scene.

Illustration 30. Gish shakes her forearm at the accused.

The climactic moments of a Griffith film, like the one I have just described, are not moments for gentle byplay. The narrative of the film has arrived at an

extraordinary event that pushes the characters to their emotional extremities. In these scenes, because the characters' feelings are so strong the signs of that emotion are at their most legible and the lexicon is most starkly evident. The persistence of conventionalized acting techniques, then, is not accidental or sporadic. Their appearance coincides with the most important moments of the films.

In arguing that acting drawing upon theatrical and oratorical traditions flourishes beyond the transitional years, I am not suggesting that an "unrealistic" acting style persists in an otherwise "realistic" medium. Griffith capitalizes on photography's capacity for appearing to capture the real or even recreate the historical well enough to be called a "historical facsimile." Vardac claims that Griffith, alongside theatrical director David Belasco, created what was called photographic realism. David Belsaco's productions were famous for their pictoral realism, as well as for using real materials rather than props. His elaborate and minutely detailed sets appeared to recreate the inside of ships or the undersides of bridges. In the less spectacular productions of drawing room dramas, Belasco was famous for including the trappings of everyday life. The actors ate real food, were soaked in rainstorms of real water, and when the cavalry came, they arrived on live horses covered in actual alkali dust (Vardac 121-124). He was very interested in the use of color and realistic lighting, and

eventually eliminated the use of foot lights in his theater. Like Belasco, Griffith strove for realism in the details of his sets as well is in the photographic facsimiles of historical events and places. Contemporary film critics, especially those who wished to praise the filmmaker, noted the similarities between Belasco and Griffith. In a 1920 Photoplay review of Way Down East, critic Burns Mantle wrote:

> This Belasco of the Screen has a definite gift for detail on which he expends an infinite amount of pains. His backgrounds are never merely plastered in, or set up hurriedly and carelessly shot. They are etched in and become not only photographically true, but atmospherically consistent and helpful to the building of the story. (Slide 276)

Belasco was a proponent of nuanced performance styles including the use of byplay, or what he called "bits of business," and built an intimate theater so as to allow audiences to see small gestures and subtle facial expressions. Yet he was still very much interested in staging emotional intensity. He was famous for developing what he called "emotional actresses," who relied on universal expressions when the drama arrived at emotionally charged moments. As Lise-Lone Marker has observed of Belasco, "Throughout his career he preserved, side by side with his naturalistic aims, this predilection for intense emotionalism reminiscent of the earlier ideal of the romantic period" (112). In his autobiography, Belasco's idea of what drew people to the theater was their desire

to have an emotional experience. "People go to the play to have their emotions stirred" (75). What he called "emotional acting" was indispensable to this end; in fact, Belasco was famous for producing "emotional stars." Belasco expressed certainty that motion pictures would never represent a serious threat to the theater, in large part because movies would never have the "power over the human emotions" that "spoken and acted drama" enjoys (203).

While both Belasco and Griffith strove to generate what A. Nicholas Vardac calls the "photographic ideal" in their respective media, both directors retained conventionalized acting codes in their productions and saw no contradiction between the realism of their sets and the conventional gestures and expressions of their actors. The easy co-existence of the "photographic ideal" with acting that is highly emotional and conventional has to do with acceptance of the ideas of natural language. The style I have been discussing represents an idealization of a natural language that purportedly grounds all emotional expression and is the substance of emotion. In other words, for contemporary audiences, the physical lexicon of emotion is about capturing and conveying artistically the very essence of the real human emotion. These films thus entail an emotional realism that complements their pictorial realism.

One of cinema's innovations, however, has been regarded as distinguishing film from theater. The close up it thought to have made subtler

facial expressions visible to movie audience in a way that they could never be to a theater audience. While gesture is ostensibly formal and rhetorical, the face is perhaps more "naturalistic," or expressive of individuality, the signs of the face being less easily reduced to unambiguous performance signs. Does the closer framing distance then facilitate a further abandonment of conventional codes by allowing for a greater reliance on the face? Lillian Gish's characters often find themselves imperiled and terrified, the camera coming close into to capture her performances of intense emotions. What Gish's performances demonstrate is that facial expressions can also be conventional. When Gish's characters are made frantic by the homicidal Battling Burrows, the sexual advances of Silas Lynch or the Marquis and his cronies, the impending drop of the guillotine's blade, and the obliterating force of a northeastern blizzard, the actor repeatedly uses two facial expressions common to pantomime.

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Fig. 192.

Ecstasy. Rapture.

Principal movements: Elevation of eyebrows; eyes turned towards heaven. Head thrown back. Lower jaw dropped.

Attitude: Fig. 16.

The action of the eyebrows shows one is possessed by an all powerful feeling; the direction of the look indicates this feeling comes from above; the relaxation of the lower jaw shows that will is absent and the individual has entirely forgotten himself.

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Fig. 193.

Fright. Terrifying sight.

Same movements as Fig. 191 with the addition of a contraction of the brows which testifies that the cause of stupefaction is a horrible spectacle or the approach of a frightful danger.

Illustration 31. Drawings of "Ecstasy/Rapture" and "Fright/Terrifying Sight" from Aubert's The Art of Pantomime.

In Broken Blossoms, for instance, Lucy shuts herself in a closet to protect herself from her murderous father, Battling Burrows. As Burrows breaks the closet door down, Gish signals terror with a raised brow and an open mouth. In the second expression, Gish also portrays Lucy as overcome with fear by slackening her face and raising her eyes up. Gish uses her body to compliment the expression by swaying and listing as if she is about to faint. Similarly, as Henriette awaits the fall of the guillotine in Orphans of the Storm, Gish performs a paroxysm of fear, opening her mouth and looking skyward, and then her face

slackens a bit and she drops her head back slightly. Gish's two expressions resemble very much like two illustrations in Aubert's The Art of Pantomime, first published in Paris in 1901 and later translated and published in New York in 1927. Gish's first expression is terror and the second expression resembles Aubert's illustration of ecstasy and rapture. Contained in the second look is an appeal heavenward, but as Aubert indicates also loss of will and of self, a capitulation. The repetition of Gish imperiled and terror-stricken, her vulnerability and helplessness are on display as essential and titillating elements in a number of Griffith's pictures, as exhibited below:

llustration 32. At the guillotine in Orphans.

Illustration 33. A terrorized Lucy in Broken Blossoms.

Illustration 34. An ecstasy of fear from Broken Blossoms.

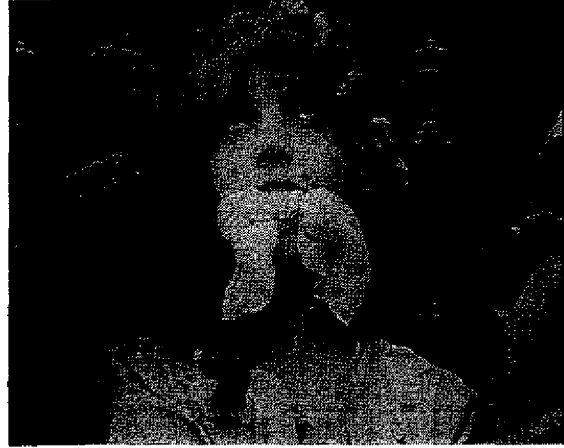

Illustration 35. Gish as Elsie in The Birth of a Nation:

With the advent of the close up, actors could use their faces to convey character and emotional/mental states. However, a reliance on the face does not mean an abandonment of conventional expression. Aubert's work shows that facial expressions were an important, and according to Aubert, an especially ancient component of the conventionalized repertoire. While some actors may have become more adept than other actors at byplay, a technique integral to the new style, and other verisimilar practices, even the most celebrated of Griffith's actors continued to use stock acting techniques. In fact, actors like Gish were especially skillful in their use of conventional techniques, adapting gestures and facial expressions to create greater emotional emphasis or underscore particular meanings.

Because Griffith's films were melodramas they all drive inexorably to moments of emotional intensity. In these scenes, quotidian life falls away to reveal raw feeling. The gestures and facial expressions catalogued in acting manuals and theorized about by rhetoricians were designed to provide expressions fit for these exceptional experiences. Because the manifestation of feeling - especially strong feeling -- was thought to be universal, conventional expression was theorized to have the greatest emotional resonance with spectators. Thus, when films arrive at their emotional core, the conventional is not resorted to but essential to the films' emotional and spectacular crescendo.

Sentimental Fiction, Natural Language and The Birth of a Nation

Sentimental fiction and silent film have in common a system for signifying emotional and mental states. Do they share other conventions and do they use their common aesthetics to achieve similar ends? One of the sentimental novel's primary didactic goals is the exemplification of a particular set of virtues. The conventional strategy for promoting virtue - and the corollary, denouncing vice - is placing characters in morally charged situations to which they respond with the appropriate - or inappropriate - emotions. The feelings these characters exhibit arise from a particular virtue and a natural disgust for vice and

appreciation of virtue. The Birth of a Nation makes use of this strategy but subsumes the project of promoting virtue within a white supremacist vision. In this way, The Birth of a Nation runs counter to the principle momentum of sentimental fiction: the extension of sympathy for disenfranchised groups. Also, one of his heroines, Flora, fails to embody mature feminine virtue as conceived of in sentimental fiction. Instead Griffith uses the character of Flora to distill the virtues of honor and purity by suspending her development.

Flora, the character so central to The Birth of a Nation, whose death inspires and justifies the formation of the Ku Klux Klan, resembles very much the heroines of sentimental novels -- that is the heroine as a young girl before she learns self-control and emotional restraint. The feelings of youthful heroines like Gerty Flint (The Lamplighter) or Ellen Montgomery (The Wide, Wide World) translate through their girl-bodies with unchecked violence. They scream in anger, hurl themselves on the ground, or fall into morose states of dejection. Similarly, Flora reacts powerfully to the events of the film: She skips and claps when hearing good news, is transported by rage and grief to a trancelike state, and laughs hysterically when overtaken by fear. In other words, performance signs used by Marsh are of the more emphatic stripe. In his The Art of Speaking, James Burgh describes the kind of joy Flora exhibits:

> *Joy*, when it is sudden or violent, expresses itself by *clapping* of the *hands*, and *exultation*, or leaping. The *eyes* are *opened* wide; perhaps filled with *tears*; often raised to *heaven*, especially by devout persons. The countenance is smiling, not composedly, but with features *aggravated*. (15)

Flora's joy is typically provoked by rather mundane sources -- playing with siblings, spotting a squirrel, meeting someone new - rather than the types of events that would provoke tears and glances heavenward. However, her movements are broad and intense when contrasted with that of her sister Margaret and Elsie Stoneman.

Although Flora's older sister Margaret (Miriam Cooper) and Elsie Stoneman (Lillian Gish) sometimes clap with pleasure, skip or run in excitement, such behavior is coded as a rupture in their more mature and dignified demeanor, or as the ways of youth that fall away with experience. In this sense, Margaret and Elsie exemplify the more typical development of a sentimental heroine. At the start of the film, Elsie is much more like Flora, that is more childlike and demonstrative. In a very early scene of the film, Elsie skips and hops. She is the sentimental heroine in her state of innocence, before the hard lessons that teach reserve and self-control, in this case the lessons brought about by the losses of the war. Elsie becomes the sobered young woman who cares for injured soldiers in a Washington D.C. hospital. She is self-sacrificing and sympathetic, qualities fundamental to the sentimental heroine. Elsie even uses

her influence to get Mrs. Cameron a visit with President Lincoln to plead her son's case.

Illustration 36. A youthful pre-war Elsie.

At the start of the film, Margaret is in a state of relative innocence, having made an incomplete transformation from child to Southern lady. When the Camerons receive a letter announcing an impending visit by the Stoneman brothers, Margaret momentarily forgets her dignified demeanor. For an instant she breaks into a run, but catches herself and continues at a statelier pace. Margaret is also affected by the war, and her lessons are perhaps harder than Elsie's. In response to the loss of two of her brothers and her "way of life," along with the decision to deny her suitor, Margaret grows dejected and morose. Margaret's reaction is a common trope in sentimental fiction: Certain losses are

so great as to overwhelm the spirit, the body registering the burden. Many corollaries to Margaret's character can be found in sentimental fiction. For instance, Emily Graham of The Lamplighter experiences a couple of grievous losses at once, her sight and her beloved, which for twenty years "blighted Emily's youth, and which, notwithstanding the flight of time, was still vivid to her recollection, casting over her life a dark shadow, of which her blindness was but a single feature" (313-314). Margaret's situation is similar: She has lost two brothers in the war and has a very distinct vision of the death of one them.

The film conveys the effect of harsh experience on Margaret in one scene in particular. Margaret sits in a garden where it appears she has been picking roses. She looks sad and distracted; her eyebrows are contracted, her mouth is in a slight frown, and she tilts her head to one side. With one hand she lets rose petals drop to the ground, then shakes her head and looks down. Margaret is relatively still and shows little attention to the task of picking flowers.

Illustration 37. Reconstruction Margaret:
A picture of grief.

Her lover Phil Stoneman sees Margaret in the garden and joins her in a two-shot. Margaret is looking to her right, away from Phil. He reaches out and touches a flower in her basket. Margaret draws her basket away, elevates her head, tilts it back, and then turns away from her lover. She moves to her right and out of the frame she had shared with her lover. Framed alone in the next shot, Margaret resumes her sad and distracted expression for a moment, and then her face changes to a look of horror, mouth open and eyes wide. With one hand in front of her she crushes a rose. The next shot is a depiction of what Margaret in her reverie imagines, the battlefield death of one of her brothers.

Illustration 38. Margaret spurns her lover.

In the next shot we see Margaret again, and her eyes and mouth widen, dilating her look of horror. The next shot is of Phil, his look of hope and affection changed to dejection. In the following shot, Margaret turns her back to her lover, which in combination with an elevation of her head, signals a proud rejection of him as a Northern victor and indirect murderer of her brother.

This scene demonstrates the fate that awaits sentimental heroines burdened by unrelieved suffering and loss: melancholia and wasted youth. Melancholy is a condition represented in acting manuals and sentimental fiction as state that can set in and express itself in a set of fixed traits. For instance, Burgh also calls melancholy "fixed grief" that is "*gloomy, sedentary, motionless*" (16). In Chironomia, Austin gives melancholy a similar description, one that closely resembles Cooper's performance:

> Melancholy is a feeble and passive affection; it is attended by a total relaxation of the nerves, with a mute and tranquil resignation....The character externally is languor without motion, the head hanging at the side next to the heart, the eyes turned upon its object, or if that is absent fixed on the ground...(492)

Cooper produces signs not only of grief but of the kind that can blight a life. She reinforces this idea, and the idea of a crushed passion for her lover, with byplay: the absent-minded destruction of the roses in her basket. The concept of a fixed emotional condition finds its way into performance discourse. Aubert instructs that certain performance signs indicate a momentary state of a character, while others that he calls "character movements" indicate permanent, character-determining habits (4). Lucy's stooped and crooked posture in Broken Blossoms, for instance, indicates the brokenness of her body and spirit. Margaret's signs of dejection threaten to imprint her character in the same way.

Flora undergoes neither a positive nor a negative transformation, but remains childlike. She feels the events of the war strongly. For instance, when the second brother is killed, she appears to lose her reasons momentarily and then to exhibit signs of hatred. Margaret intercedes to sooth her younger sister, and Flora exhibits no after effects. Unlike Margaret, she exhibits no resentments toward the Stoneman family, melancholy, or even an increase in sobriety. Flora's behavior remains emblematic of the innocent state of childhood, when feelings flow unmitigated by experience or affectation. Once the "little Colonel" is

restored to the family, she is as exuberant as she was before the war. That experience does not change Flora represents a departure from the typical sentimental heroine, whose story is a Christian bildungsroman. In the journey from innocence to experience, the heroine's encounters with loss and oppression yield a dependence on Christ and a sober equanimity.

Illustration 39. A still-exuberant Flora greets a startled Elsie after the war.

Flora's suspension in childhood, her continued inhibition and "natural" behavior serve the racist arguments of the film in a number of ways. In a scene during the Reconstruction half of the film, the little sister exhibits outrage and disgust when Elsie shakes the hand of Silas Lynch. Flora's feelings here cannot be read as affected or as response to something as superficial as a breach in social

custom. Flora's are the feelings of an innocent outraged by the dismantling of the racial hierarchy. Before the heroines of sentimental novels are transformed by experience, calmed by lessons of self-control, and schooled in virtue, they often exhibit reliable moral instincts based on a natural affinity for virtue and antipathy for vice. This innate moral inclination leads sentimental heroines to make good moral judgments, often in the face of law and custom. When Flora and Elsie encounter Lynch, Reconstruction has brought a tremendous change in the legal status of blacks. Not only are they freed from slavery but black men have the vote. Lynch and other blacks in the film are also interested in enjoying equality social equality. Thus, when Flora reacts with disapproval to Elsie and Lynch's handshake, she is showing the natural moral superiority of the unschooled sentimental heroine, who can recognize wrong even if it is supported by the law or countenanced by custom. Moreover, that Flora's feelings spring from a natural source indicts racial equality as a subversion of a natural order. This theme of outraged nature is taken up more explicitly later in the film when Gus pursues Flora through the forest.

Illustration 40. Flora outraged by inter-racial handshake.

The virtue that Flora is schooled in and that the film is orchestrated to promote is honor. As with a sentimental novel, The Birth of a Nation has particular didactic aims, one of which is the installation of virtue. The Birth of a Nation casts a particular version of honor as a virtue essential to its heroes and heroines – particular because the film ties honor to the preservation of the privileged position of whites in a naturalized racial hierarchy. The little Colonel and Flora exhibit honor when they express pride in the position they hold in the racial hierarchy and when they defend that place. This is the case, for when little Colonel defends his honor, i.e., his superiority in the racial hierarchy, by refusing an introduction to Silas Lynch that would make social equals of them. The actor, Henry B. Walthall, performs the Ben Cameron's pride of place and refusal by

tilting his head back and swelling his chest, and then folding his arms and turning his back to Lynch. We see Flora's education in honor when the little Colonel drapes over Flora's shoulders the confederate flag, the symbol of the Southern "way of life" of which slavery is an integral practice. Later we see product of that education when Flora swears on the confederate flag to keep secret her brother's activities in the Klan. That honor in The Birth of a Nation is cast as agreement among whites to preserve privilege narrows the sphere of moral concern, meaning the way you treat anyone outside the sphere governed by this agreement is not restricted by moral considerations. Thus the film excuses the violence and underhandedness of the Klan.

Illustration 41. Ben Cameron refuses Silas Lynch's hand.

Here I should note that honor receives racial coding in the film as a decidedly white characteristic. Black characters (played by actors in blackface) exhibit honor in the film when they defend their white masters and either directly or indirectly preserve their subservient place in the racial hierarchy. The Camerons' house slaves, who stay on after the war as servants, save their masters from capture, but real heroism is undercut by slapstick. The moral didacticism of film lies in its repeatedly tying honor to the preservation of white supremacy, and to whiteness itself.

Black characters in The Birth of a Nation are also not instigators or leaders, but are instead followers of whites (as is the case with the black raiders who descend on Piedmont behind a white officer) or mixed-race characters, like Silas Lynch. Within the racist economy of the film, the mixing of blood is trouble for a number of reasons, one of which is the addition of ambition to the character of a race otherwise contented and naturally servile. The ultimate argument of the film is that white supremacy is the natural order which the Klan forms to restore, and presumably when mixed-raced blacks like Lynch are put down and whites like Stoneman are shown the errors of their ways, most blacks will fall in line.

In fact, while the film depicts military defeat and the policies of Reconstruction as having largely dissolved the white power structure, the scene in which Gus (played by an actor in blackface) pursues Flora through the woods

and over a precipice plays out the most decisive threat to racial hierarchy, miscegenation. After all, a power structure based on race depends upon the myth of racial purity. The mise en scene conveys aesthetically what is at stake. Flora, delighting in the natural world around her, is evenly and fully lit. Gus, on the other hand, lurks in the shadows stalking Flora, his blackness appearing to overtake the frame with a very dark iris. At work in this scene also is the idea that Silas Lynch's talk of racial equality has unleashed in Gus a latent bestial desire. Flora, visually linked with a squirrel, is prey to Gus's predator.

Honor propels Flora to forfeit her life rather than submit to rape. Such an act by someone so natural implies that the mixing of the races is an anathema to nature, justifying whatever methods whites choose to defend against miscegenation, be that leaping off a cliff or joining a secret organization designed to terrorize blacks. In fact, the film depicts the mixing of the races as the one true evil. The battles between North and South are simply the squabbles of an immature nation. The war between the Union and the Confederacy are likened to the "hostilities" between the puppy and the kitten in the introduction to the Cameron family, and the hair pulling of the younger brothers in each family. The true villains of The Birth of a Nation are the mulattoes Silas Lynch and Stoneman's housekeeper, who are fueled by a psycho-sexual ambition to undo the racial hierarchy.

Another virtue essential to Flora, to this scene, and to nearly all of Griffith's heroines is purity. Griffith is famous for imperiling his heroines with the threat of rape or other types of violent bodily harm. While this is a trope common to sentimental novels of the eighteenth century, notably Pamela, Clarissa, and the gothic novels of Anne Radcliffe, it is exceedingly rare in the American sentimental novels of nineteenth century. Sexual exploitation and rape are sometimes the subjects of sentimental novels written by African American women, as is the case in Iola Leroy and Contending Forces, because their works speak to the experience of black women under slavery. However, the threat of rape is never made into a dramatic event, and is certainly not the suspenseful and titillating centerpiece it is in Griffith's films. By organizing the drama around a threatened rape, Griffith brings to the fore the issue of sexual purity that is an assumed characteristic of the white sentimental heroine and makes it their primary virtue – better to die than to live without it.

Depending upon who is threatening rape, Griffith is able to make arguments about race and class. I have covered The Birth of a Nation, but in Broken Blossoms a similar threat occurs. When Cheng Huan is harboring Lucy in his room above his shop, there is a moment when his desire for Lucy is evident. Being injured Lucy is quite vulnerable, but Cheng Huan stops himself from taking advantage of the situation; instead of kissing Lucy he kisses her

sleeve. Chang has a number of fine qualities; he is peace loving and artistic, and once he had even higher ambitions to bring the peaceful lessons of Buddhism to the hyper-violent West. In this sense, Broken Blossoms is anti-racist. However, the message of the film also seems to be that he, like the blacks in The Birth of a Nation, desire white women and hope to find them vulnerable. The difference in the races is that the Chinese are self-regulating and know their proper place, as indicated by the deferential nature of kissing a sleeve. The anti-racist message becomes one about relative threat, with the Chinese coming out as the lesser threat. The film also argues strenuously for a class hierarchy by measuring Cheng Huan against the bestial and clearly lower class Burrows.

Illustrations 41-42. A threatening Cheng Huan changes course and kisses Lucy's sleeve in Broken Blossoms.

The Birth of a Nation's version of virtue runs counter to the politics of sentimental fiction. Whereas the sentimental novel provides reasons for redefining the social order and even provides a place to imagine a renewed society, The Birth of a Nation uses its conception of honor as a rationale for reasserting social order of a profoundly patriarchal and racist stripe. Furthermore, while the sentimental novel's principle cultural work is the extension of sympathies to disenfranchised groups, The Birth of a Nation argues for the violent subjugation of such a group at the moment of their enfranchisement. To make these arguments, Griffith has to do violence to history and turn the world upside down in order to make the whites out to be the embattled, beleaguered and disenfranchised group. However, this was a tale that the white America was evidently ready to hear, was in fact already telling itself.[1]

Conclusion

The addition of sentimental literature to an inter-textual reading of The

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[1] The Birth of a Nation eventually grossed over $60 million. President Woodrow Wilson screened the film at the White House. Wilson, a former history professor and whose scholarship appears in the film's inter-titles, proclaimed it not only historically accurate but "history writ with lightning." The Ku Klux Klan, which had disbanded in the 1870s because its white supremacist goals of denying blacks the vote and other civil liberties had been achieved, reformed in the 1915. As a result, the United States saw a resurgence of lynching, which had subsided somewhat during World War I. On a positive note, The Birth of a Nation galvanized the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in its opposition to the film.

Birth of a Nation not only deepens the reading, it underscore the difference between Griffith's version of the sentimental, or rather his use and revision of sentimental tropes and character types, in the service of a project very much antithetical to the central projects of literary sentimentalism. In fact, it could be said that Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s novel and theatrical production, The Clansman, along with Griffith's adaptation, served to undo the cultural work performed by the sentimental novel, specifically the work of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Dixon was motivated by a 1901 staging of Harriet Beecher Stowe's classic Uncle Tom's Cabin, which depicted African Americans in a positive light, to produce a play that offered his own version of Reconstruction:

> My object is to teach the North, the young North, what it has never known—the awful suffering of the white man during the dreadful Reconstruction period. I believe that Almighty God anointed the white men of the South by their suffering during that time . . . to demonstrate to the world that the white man must and shall be supreme.[2]

Identifying the inversion of the sentimental project is important because of the cultural memory loss that surrounds the sentimental as a literary past. As Suzanne Clark has so persuasively argued, modernism initiated the occluding and ultimately the forgetting of this literary history by defining itself in opposition to all things sentimental. Because women by in large wrote

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[2] Information on Dixon comes from the Center for History and New Media website: http://chnm.gmu.edu.

sentimental fiction, female literary production was associated with mass culture, written off as non-serious literature, and then forgotten. What remains in the place of a known literary history is the sentimental as a vague cultural category, or a term that means "not art." Griffith's version of the sentimental needs to be regarded as an appropriation and inversion of literary sentimentalism, otherwise his version of the sentimental supplants the earlier one. What takes the place of a literary tradition that critiques patriarchy, provides entrances to political discussions, and argues for greater independence for women, is a version of the sentimental heroine in league with or patsy to patriarchy. The subjectivity of the sentimental heroine is infantilized, purity is elevated to her single most important virtue, and she reduced, at least in Flora's case, to a catalyst for male activity.

The ideas of natural language have also experienced a tremendous reversal, so much so that the very idea that actors were even attempting to capture real human experience has been lost. This is evident if one eavesdrops on current conversations about acting. Here, for instance, is an excerpt from an interview film scholar Carole Zucker conducted with actor and acting teacher Lindsay Crouse:

> LC:...I don't know if anyone has talked to you about Stanislavski's theory of acting, it was really a philosophy based on the time that came before him; what he was rejecting was a certain declamatory,

> presentational theater, full of devices, not organic, not of this life and this world. Where actors were set apart in the proscenium. They even studied gestures they felt were archetypal of certain psychological situations.
> CZ: You mean Delsarte and his followers?
> LC: Yeah. Stanislavski was rejecting that, and he, like Freud, tried to get an actor to have the courage to let things come up from the bottom. And the preparations that he was recommending were attempts to have an actor commit himself to the action that he was performing, that had very much to do with him [the actor]. There was not a universal formula for it; it was highly personalized.

Clearly, relying on stock gestures is very distant from what is presently regarded as the practice of acting. Again, as Crouse suggests, the transformation in acting comes with the transformation in the understanding human experience wrought by Freud. Instead of actors striving to hit the universal emotional notes imagined to resonate with an audience, actors now are more likely to reach for authentic representation by digging down into their own psyches. Looking at The Birth of a Nation through these two forgotten but once dominant discourses of the sentimental and natural language reconstructs some of the structures of feeling around feeling and around the film's production and reception.

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